

**THE SHILLING
SOLDIERS**

DENIS GARSTIN

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The Shilling Soldiers

THE SHILLING SOLDIERS

BY
DENIS GARSTIN

WITH A PREFACE
BY
HUGH WALPOLE

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

Preface

DENIS NORMAN GARSTIN was born on the 22nd July, 1890. He won a scholarship at Blundell's School, Tiverton, in 1904, and was afterwards a scholar at Sydney Sussex College, Cambridge. In 1912 he took up a tutorship in the Crimea, and from that time until the outbreak of war contributed many articles to the London Press. He was in Russia in July, 1914, reached England in the middle of August, and was given a commission in the 18th Hussars. He crossed to France in the spring of 1915, and was transferred to the 10th Hussars, served with the machine-gun squadron at the battles of Ypres, Thiépval, Albert and Loos. In September, 1916, he was summoned to

Russia, and attached to the British Embassy at Petrograd on special propaganda work. When the British Embassy left Petrograd on February 18th of this year he continued in diplomatic work at Moscow. He was summoned to the North of Russia in July, and reached Kem at the end of that month after many perilous escapes and adventures. He was then sent on the Onega expedition, in which he greatly distinguished himself, and after that, on August 11th, started off on what he held to be "A nice quiet little expedition." It was on this expedition that he lost his life, after capturing one armoured car by his own efforts and exposing himself in an endeavour to secure another. He was buried with full military honours on August 21st, 1918, in the cemetery at Archangel.

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I have given this little chronicle of Denis Garstin's life in some detail, because it shows, as nothing else can, the various adventures and experiences that he crowded into his twenty-eight years. To many men it has happened that the last four years have brought romance and adventure to an extent that would, a short while back, have seemed incredible. Denis Garstin, I believe, would have crammed romance into his life with eager hands, whatever the external world might have seen fit to do; and that, not because he was restless or ambitious or self-seeking, but simply for the reason that he was an artist.

I have met many artists in my time, some artists by deliberate adoption, some artists by curiosity, some artists by ambition; but the born artist, who cannot help himself, who transmutes by his own spirit everything that he touches, however

common and unclean, into gold, is a rare creature. Of such a select company was Denis Garstin. Whatever the world might be into which destiny drew him, he assimilated its colour and texture until he became so thoroughly a part of it that it seemed to be his only possible condition. And yet, in spite of that assimilation, he never lost his own adventurous personality. That book, *Friendly Russia*, the one book published during his lifetime, was amongst the first of the English views of Russia. Since its publication there have been many volumes in England about Russia, and still that little collection of sketches seems to me to have a fragrance and atmosphere that nearly all the later pictures have lacked. It was a book that had faults of inexperience, and I think his *Shilling Soldiers* a far riper and more effective work; but that freshness remains, and gives those pages more than

an ephemeral life. I like to think of that day when he first came to see me about his proposed work in Russia. He had just been recalled from France, and was highly indignant. I can see him now, looking about nineteen, flushed and angry, protesting that it was quite impossible for him to leave his men, and that it was preposterous of the authorities to ask him to do this. When he saw he was under definite orders he gave way; but I remember how uncomfortable I felt, exactly as though I had taken away, for no reason at all, one of his most cherished possessions. Then, as time passed, and he gradually assimilated his Russian project, it was delightful to see the zest and eagerness with which he entered into the new world, giving it at once a colour and symmetry of his own. It would be impossible to speak too highly of the work that he did during that difficult year of 1917 in Russia. To no

one can it have been more difficult than to him, because his love of freedom, his belief in the magnificent potentialities of men and his eager visions of an Utopia that seemed to his young spirit no difficult realization led him to claim the opening phases of the Russian Revolution with eagerness and happy confidence. None of us who shared in it will forget the spirit of that first week of the Revolution ; it *did* seem possible for a moment that the Kingdom of God was come upon earth. Then, as the clouds gathered, and it became once more apparent that that Kingdom can never be realized by desire alone, but demands for its stability discipline and self-sacrifice, one man after another lost hope. This, I think, Denis Garstin never did ; to the day of his death, as his last letters show, he believed that that first impulse would find its right channel at last, and that all

the terrors of Bolshevism and the horrors that accompanied it, were mere spate and turmoil on the surface of the current that flowed strong and certain to its appointed destiny. He was chaffed, I remember, a great deal for this idealism of his ; he had again and again to acknowledge that facts were against him, and he never refused to admit the dishonour and shame of the anarchy into which that revolution developed. But his confidence remained, and it is one of the tragic ironies of life that he should have been killed by the people whom he loved, believing in the future of that land as many of its own citizens did not.

I have spoken here mainly about Russia because it was in Russia that I knew him ; but this book, *Shilling Soldiers*, although it was written round his French experiences, illustrates to the full that same idealism and humorous confidence in life

of which I have spoken. The books about the British soldier in this war are now legion, and it is strange to me how few of them carry with them an atmosphere of individual personality. There occurs to my mind as I write Miss Bagnold's *A Diary without Dates*, John Masefield's *Gallipoli*, Captain Brett Young's *Marching on Tanga* and *The Crescent Moon*; with these, I think, Denis Garstin's *Shilling Soldiers* may definitely rank. *The Diary of a Timid Man* is exactly that mixture of imagination and hard definite realism that seems to me to be art; he had the way of giving detail a colour and form that made it his own detail without forcing it to be untrue. That he had the dramatic gift none who read *The Runaway* can doubt, and *Trooper Kinnaird* and *Love o' Woman* have humour of a very remarkable kind. As to his poetic vision, *Wind in the Trenches* and *The Pigeon* are proof enough. These

were fine gifts. It is useless now to prophesy of what he might have done, but I am glad to think that there are evidences enough here of as fine and noble a spirit as the English soil has ever created.

HUGH WALPOLE.

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Into Action

Into Action

“THERE’S France.”

The morning mist was drawn aside like a delicate curtain, and in the early sunlight we saw France, waking freshly to another day. The sea played around her coast, as if teasing her into wakefulness, and we soldiers, going to battle for the first time, felt with unreasoned wonder how strange it was that the smiling land should bear so little trace of the havoc that was being wrought within her.

Havre greeted us with the smell of roasted coffee and the staccato bustle of morning. Black-jowled men, their hands deep in baggy trousers, wearing the familiar blue blouses, watched us go past, with the disdain of their kind for those

who carry their own luggage. The little tables in front of cafés, as the day wore on, were soon occupied by serious bourgeois, who scowled at their papers, and drank *p'tits verres* in moments of abstraction. Around market booths and down all the streets their women were shopping as vigorously as ever.

“Gad, but they're different to us, aren't they?” said a subaltern. “You'd have thought with a war on like this they wouldn't be so—so French.”

To us that morning Havre stood for an epitome of France. Leaving England, as yet unchanged, we expected to find this land convulsed with the war. But Havre was the Havre of old days; the habits and the mannerisms of its people triumphing over all emergencies. English soldiers, mingling good-humouredly in the traffic, the “Dailee Mail” shouted as shrilly as “Le P'tit Parisien” were the

only differences at first sight. But soon we noticed a new habit in the people, a habit, an impulse, perhaps, of smiling, whenever they caught sight of us, friendly and with gratitude.

It was a long journey to the Front, broken for a while at Rouen. Rouen, we felt, was our jumping-off place into war, and we made the utmost of our last chance to live keenly and treasure jealously every impression of the place.

The vitality of Rouen was intoxicating. One had but to sit at a café on the quay and everything went past one in a jumble, like a modern picture of "Movement" or "Human Energy." There was the river packed with shipping, the Grand Pont crowded with workers, huge cranes on the banks unloading stores, trams clanging by, and motors, and trains puffing heavily along, and miles of goods wagons, and French soldiers of all kinds, and Turcos,

and English Tommies, and Indians, and midinettes with their polished black hair and bold eyes and insistent figures, and obese *pères* and *mères de famille*, dragging little children along, who looked round anxiously at the gaiety and movement, taking stock of it all for future use. There it went past, all in one *coup d'œil*—the trains, the traffic and the passers-by in their thousands—a kaleidoscope of colour and noise and vitality, but dominating it all were the women, laughing, insolent, stern, rigid, forceful, curious, whatever they were, they seemed, among the machinery and clamour around them, themselves to be the life-force.

And then, as counterpart, the English Tommy, the good-natured spectator watching it all. “*Comment ces Anglais ont le sourire serieux,*” said a woman taking her coffee with her husband. “*Ils se moquent de tous, et cependant, ils ne*

sont pas des cyniques.” But “ces Anglais” were going to the war.

We went one evening, some two thousand of us on each train, and the men sang and cheered and threw food to the children, who crowded the railway, shouting, “Souvenirs—biscuits.” We left Rouen silhouetted against the sunset, a flaring red sunset, that reflected itself in the Seine as we crossed it, so that the black houses and spires seemed in a world of flame.

And so to battle.

The men, all along the train, cheered and sang and dropped off eventually to sleep. In our *coupé* we sat up most of the night and talked.

E—— said, breaking into our conversation, after a long silence on his part : “ Oh, you chaps, you’re talking rot. The war will go on for years, but it won’t matter to me. I’ll run away the first time I hear

a shot fired. I know I shall. I'm in the most awful funk already."

We had all heard this from E—before. Moreover, we all felt exactly as he did, but we were less frank about it. Only on the duration of the war did we all differ from him. He laughed.

"I know Germany, you fellows. I've lived for years with Hermann the Hun. He's got us cooked. Who's the cleverest man in the world? Von Falkenhayn. You and I are pitted against Von Falkenhayn. It's ludicrous. It's very beautiful, but it's ludicrous. Like mice against a cat. And our papers talk about pushes—pushes—and victory. Ye gods, I shall just run away. Come on, say something."

We all barked round him like a lot of terriers. But he laughed at us and turning over went quietly to sleep. After eight months of war we believed utterly in victory, and that an immediate one.

We believed our Government had made every preparation, that we had the men and the munitions and that now we were just going in to finish up the whole business. Most of us, I know, felt angry that we had been kept back in England all these months and were only now going in, after our friends had borne the brunt, to "gallop 'em over the Rhine."

And so we talked, and blamed our luck, and confident of victory, tried to ignore the terror that lurked even in success.

When we woke up it was Sunday. It was hot and sunny, and very peaceful. Along the white roads we saw little groups of villagers going to Mass. They noticed the troop train and waved to us, and the men waved and shouted back. In vain we looked for signs of war, for lorries, or troops moving up, or depôts, or "parks," or anything that showed our business there. It was just a warm Sunday.

Swallows darted along the canals, boys splashed in little rivers or raced around naked in the sun, carts trailed lazily along the dusty lanes, and until we reached Hazebrouck, nothing but a hospital train saved us from feeling that some mistake had been made and we were in a land of peace.

Even at Hazebrouck, there was little sign, except for a few grey-green motors that buzzed to and fro. Only it sounded as if the sea were not very far away. One could hear breakers, it seemed, booming on the shore.

“Oh, yes,” said a subaltern, who had come to meet us, noticing that we listened. “You can hear the guns all right.”

He said it with a carelessness that shocked us. It was impossible for us, haunted by the knowledge since the first days of the war that we must face these guns, to believe that we could ever speak of them with a like carelessness. And we

envied him enormously. He knew how he would behave in a bombardment, while not one of us for eight months had lived a day free from the dread of our cowardice.

“But are those our guns?” asked Billy S——, who never minded what questions he asked.

The subaltern snorted. “My dear old thing,” he said, “didn’t you know we haven’t any?”

Then he told us that the regiment had been badly smashed a few days earlier, and that directly we’d re-formed, we’d probably go up again, and be smashed again. And so on. “We haven’t got a damned thing,” he said, “not even men.”

He whistled and rode out to join our regiment.

“He’s one of those pessimists,” said Billy. “I heard it for a fact in London that everything’s going splendidly.”

The regiment, however, bore out the

subaltern. Though cavalry, it had been filling gaps in the trenches all the winter and now again it was terribly shattered, and very silent about everything. But, when a few days later we had found our feet, and were ordered up to the line, to hold it at all costs, I heard something near a complaint from my immediate O.C.

“ I wish to God they'd stop carrying on 'as usual' and get to business,” he said.

“ Who ? ” I asked.

He looked at me and raised his eyebrows, crinkling his moustache up against his nose. “ Oh, the people at home,” he said. “ I don't know. They know their job. But they seem to be taking this pretty easily.”

The buses, all blacked over, came for us, snorting and jolting as though they were still resentful of their new job. The men clambered on board and pretended they were back in London. Our bus had

“Willesden” on it and a man called Piggott, who knew its old route, wandered up and down, giving all the roads we were supposed to pass, and punching imaginary tickets with a Verrey Pistol.

“’Ello, mates,” shouted some passing A.S.C. men. “’Oo are you?”

“’Aven’t you ever seen a cavalry charge before?” yelled Piggott. “’Ere we come, the—cavalry, bussing off to battle.”

“Oh, gawd.”

The country was still as peaceful as it had been on our journey up. Peasants worked in the fields, lazy cattle chewed the cud, taking no notice of us. Except for occasional soldiers in villages, or lorries on the road, there was not a sign of war. At last we came to a town—Poperinghe—and passed down a long street. At each doorway women sat, clicking their bobbins, and so intent on their lace making, or else so little interested in us, that none

looked up to notice us as we passed. In the centre of the town we turned a corner, into a ruined street, with never a sign of life. Its silence almost took our breath away.

“Gor, it begins sudden, don't it?” said a man.

Thenceforth the land was quiet still, but dreary, disfigured with old camping-grounds, and cart tracks running anywhere across the fields. There was scarcely a sign of life anywhere. From Valmeringue we went on foot, pestered at first by a rag-tag mob, selling biscuits and chocolates at huge prices, like the pedlars outside a race-course.

It was already dark when we reached Ypres. I did not recognize the town at first. I had expected to pass through camps and troops and artillery parks and all the paraphernalia of war. It shocked me to march through a waste land and

find a rubbish heap of masonry and hear a soldier say : " Poor old Yeeeps."

" Where is everyone ? " I asked my C.O.

Again he crinkled up his moustache, which was a trick he had, I soon learnt, whenever any call was put on his imagination.

" Oh, I don't know," he said. " Dead, I suppose."

In all the Ypres I saw that night not a house was intact. From time to time a shell would come wailing over and burst somewhere in the town and we heard the rumble of a wall collapsing. Ypres was still burning. On either side the houses roared and crackled and fell crashing down, as a great tide of flame surged through the shattered buildings, now sending out deep waves of fire, now a foam of sparks. Against the dark sky the city was incredibly bright, for every ruined facade that was itself not burning, reflected the

glare of its blazing *vis-à-vis* ; and the long column of troops, marching, it seemed into the very flames, looked strange and fantastic among the leaping blaze. It was, at last, the entry into war.

Beyond the city was desolation, a wide dark plain, cut with shallow trenches and shell-holes, encumbered with endless wires and littered with broken carts, dead horses, rifles, kit, and odd remnants of cottages long since destroyed—the usual back-wash of modern fighting.

It was a bleak, grim country, very dark, but surrounded on all sides, so it seemed, by a ring of fire. Behind us, when we halted, we saw the town and the tower, broken, but somehow, full of dignity, silhouetted against the blaze. And around us, north, east and south was the Front, “lit up all gala-like” with flares that swooped and plotted out the salient in a wave of dancing lights. And here, in this

narrow area behind the lines, was movement, fatigue parties wandering about disconsolately, rations carted along the decaying roads, limbers carrying shells to some field-guns, signallers mending wires that everyone tripped over and broke again, sappers going grumblingly to the trenches to do "what the bluddy infantry ought to be able to do for themselves, if only they'd an ounce of intelligence," and then once, as we sat resting in a ditch, a remnant of the "bluddy infantry" themselves, -filthy, ragged, tottering, went stumbling past us in the dark. Every now and then we marched through waves of smell from rotting horses, or passed haphazard graves, and as we got nearer to our lines, bullets from all around came whining, whistling in about us.

Some limbered wagons rattled past, drawing a wave of fire. A soldier shouted to them to go slowly and quietly. The

driver's answer was terse and withering, "but after all," as someone said, "the poor perishers 'ave got to do it every blinking night, and you wouldn't catch me walking."

Some shells came over, too, and burst near us. They were our first shells, and those of us who were new to war felt, I think, enormous relief. For eight months they had been our nightmare, and when they came, were less dreadful than our imaginings.

And then, at last, we reached Sanctuary Wood, and, scrambling up through the trees, almost before we realized where we were, dropped into a trench.

"'Ere you are, sir," said a sergeant.

"Where's the front?" I asked, bewildered.

An officer of the relieved regiment put a paper in my hand.

"That'll show you all the positions and

ranges," he said. "I'm off. Good luck, and mind the sniper in the sap."

Still very bewildered, I tried to take my bearings, and standing up on a step, looked out. Just then a flare swooped up near by and not very far away I saw a row of black and white sandbags. There was plenty to look at, for the wood stopped with our trench, and I saw tangled masses of wire stretched across the field, and some dark figures lying about and—suddenly some shots rang out and I ducked.

"God," I said, "I'm here at last."

.

The next few days were quiet and I had time to realize what "being here" really meant.

I had left London only ten days before, all agog with the certainty of victory. Nothing had been told us to mar our full complacency. We thought we had every-

thing. People, saying Good-bye, had cheerfully spoken of my being back for dances and hunting in the winter, and had believed it, even as I had believed it. The long journey through France, bare of camps and troops and supplies, had hardly touched my confidence. Nothing touched it until I found myself there—there at last—pushed in as the very last reserves in France, with no troops and only one battery of field-guns behind us, and twelve shells a day, to hold on, to hold the line at all costs.

“The moral,” said Napoleon, “is to the physical as three to one,” but the Germans pounding away, north and south, seemed to outnumber us by scores. And what was our morale? I knew nothing of our army in France, except from what I had read in the papers, and that now I began violently to disbelieve. The men I had heard grousing back in the salient seemed

very different creatures from the gay, sarcastic heroes of the press.

“O God,” I said one day, “how long shall we hold out, when the time comes?”

The time soon came. We were out of it, out of it by so little, that the blasts of air from the bombardment blew about the papers in our trench. The Germans, we knew, were smashing a way through our lines, and when that was smashed, they would pour in and cut us off and break our line.

“The 3rd D.G.’s are sticking it,” came our only news. “But they’re nearly wiped out. And then——”

The bombardment rose to a roar. Thousands of shells screamed over, as though they, too, were mad for blood. The trees, even the ground rocked, where we were.

I began to get panicky, searched frantically for some new place to put a gun against the time, not far distant, it

scemed, when the Germans should be through and attacking us from all sides. And then the roar stopped, and as I rounded a traverse in the silence, I heard a man say :

“ You know, if the war ended to-morrer, I’d go and shake ’ands with Fritz.”

“ What the ’ell for ? ” said his mate.

“ Oh, be fair,” said the first. “ You know he’s not putting up such a bad fight.”

And then, thank God, I laughed.

Wind in the Trenches

Wind in the Trenches

A SUBALTERN stumbled out of his shelter, stretched himself and glanced around him.

The night was quiet, and men lay about the trench, sleeping like children after the rigours of the day. Here and there sentries standing on the fire-step looked out over No-Man's-Land, dark, watchful figures against the summer sky, but nothing moved except a gentle wind, that brought a scent of flowers into the trench.

There was a moon that night, a half-moon, that hung above the stripped trees, and showed them up in the delicate silhouette. It was scarcely a night of war. You almost expected something whimsical to happen.

Here and there a point of light glinted, reflected from a bayonet; star-shells swooped fantastically across the sky, and stray blades of grass drooped under the heavy dew, that gleamed in the moonshine, against dark shadows.

The subaltern, his mind growing imaginative under the quick process of battle, found himself repeating Herrick's "Night Piece to Julia":

" Her eyes the glow worm lend thee,
The shooting stars attend thee,
And the elves also,
Whose little eyes glow
Like the sparks of fire, befriend thee."

For a few moments he paused, transforming the war into such pleasant terms, with a Julia, the visionary Julia of many subalterns, thus protected. Then he went down the trench towards the scene of the day's battle.

It had been hard fighting—hopeless

fighting it had seemed at the outset. The enemy had everything, and our men nothing, except the will to hold on until the end. And at the critical moment the end had not come.

He reached the edge of the wood and looked down a slope. The ground was a waste heap. The orderly line of trenches disappeared among piles of debris—the debris of earth and bodies and shattered kit. There were the piles of German dead, cut down by the handful of English, who had fallen at the posts. Dead, they all looked very much alike, tumbled, futile things, exasperatingly useless. It was hard to imagine personalities, much less the flame of heroism in these mangled wrecks; impossible to think that these things had drunk their tea, and spat out dregs, only that morning, and had laughed.

Their few remaining comrades were

wearily digging a new trench. The regiments on either side had closed in a little, but relief was impossible. There was no relief.

“ Oh God ! ” said the subaltern, and he looked up at the serene moon.

He went back along his trench into the wood. A moth droned into his face, and startled him. He imagined for a moment he had been hit. He went up a sap, and looked through a rough periscope a man had made. It was very still among the trees. There the dead seemed to be resting, they were less shattered and disjointed. Suddenly, as he shifted the periscope, he saw something moving. It was no substance, just a lightness, gliding in and out of the trees. He felt chill, and looked out over the parapet, but there was nothing to be seen.

The owner of the periscope noticed his anxiety.

“ Did you see anything white moving, sir ? ” he asked.

“ Yes, but there’s nothing in it,” said the subaltern hurriedly, although he felt at once alarmed and relieved that others had seen it too.

“ Yes, sir,” said the soldier, “ but it puzzled me a bit at first, too, till I found it was a flaw of glass in the periscope. Some of the boys thought it was a spook, you know.”

The officer laughed quickly : “ Since ghost there’s none to affright thee, eh ? ” and passed on.

When he arrived back at his shelter, he found there was half an hour before “ stand-to,” so he crawled out of the trench to see a position he had marked for a machine-gun. It covered no part of the front line, but swept back into the salient, in case the enemy broke through on their flank. From it he could see the

glare of Ypres burning, and the line of the front marked out by the star-shells. It seemed to him, that the Germans were almost all round him. There was only a gap due west in the horizon of swooping flares.

Somewhere to the south, in contrast to the quiet salient, came the noise of firing. It was far off—down Plug Street way, thought the subaltern, and the sound moved him. He had a feeling of companionship with those fellows there. "All in the same game," he said to himself.

Suddenly he heard a sharp rattle of musketry. It crackled out some two miles to the north-west, angrily, viciously. Once it paused, then burst out again and blazed along the front.

He watched and listened, for a moment. The affair had broken out too far away for him to feel involved. To his overwrought mind it was just like a fire,

crackling in the distance, and from where it sprang up a blaze of star-shells swept the land.

In a few moments it had spread and raced down the line, tracing out the salient in a hurricane of light and clamour, "just as if someone had switched it on." It disappeared—ended, he thought—in Hooze Wood—then suddenly he realized it was racing towards him.

"Gad, it's coming here," he gasped. "What the devil's the matter? An attack?"

He scrambled towards his trench, and reached it, just in time to see his men jump up, more asleep than awake, and, grabbing their rifles, fire wildly over the parapet.

He caught a man by the arm. "What are you firing at?" he asked.

"Dunno," said the man, reloading.

“Then stop it,” he shouted, and the man obeyed.

The trench was full of men, firing as fast as they could snap their bolts. His sergeant came stumbling along, cursing.

“What’s up, sergeant ?” he called.

“Wind, sir. Got the wind up, the fools,” and together they began pulling men off the fire-step.

Suddenly a machine-gun began blazing away from the sap he had lately visited.

“Stop that gun, sergeant. I’ll deal with these fellows.”

He sent a corporal one way, and himself went the other, and in a few minutes all was quiet, except for occasional snaps from men in isolated posts, and star-shells that swept up to reassure the enemy.

He ran into a captain, who was more contemptuous than angry.

“Silly windy fools,” he said. “Who started it ?”

“Some regiment up Pilken way,” said the subaltern, “and it swept down in a minute. Poor devils,” he added, “they’re dead beat and didn’t wait to think. But what worries me is that a machine-gun gave its position away.”

“Go and shift it then,” said the captain. “Damn their wind, it pulls people to bits.”

The subaltern moved off, but the Germans forestalled him. They had evidently marked the place, for before he reached the sap half a dozen shells had burst in it. He met his sergeant lurching out of the entrance.

“Get the gun out, damme,” he shouted, catching the other by his shoulder.

The sergeant winced. “There ain’t no gun, sir,” he said quietly. “It’s gone West. Look out, sir.”

A shell came screaming over and burst a few yards beyond them. As they

crouched, the subaltern felt his hand was sticky.

“Sorry, sergeant,” he said. “Are you badly hit?”

“Nothing to speak of, sir,” he answered, though his shoulder was all mangled.

He sent the sergeant back, and went up the sap.

There was little left of the gun, and around it lay two men. One was only stunned, and in a little he “came to,” and carried back his fellow, whose leg was gone. Some few yards further on he found the private through whose periscope he had looked half an hour earlier. The man was quite dead, and lay huddled at the bottom of the trench.

The subaltern felt suddenly sick, and went back. All was quiet again, but he felt he could not stay among his men, so, following some unaccountable desire, crawled out to where he had lain and

watched the salient spring into the blaze of war.

He lay there, dizzy and miserable, waiting for the new day. A wave of hopelessness swept over him, centred somehow on the figure lying prone in the bottom of the trench. Darkness still held the land, hiding all the destruction of war, but in his mind's eye he saw mile upon mile of trenches, and men lying inert and heavy against the hard earth, mile upon mile of them, to be buried haphazardly and replaced by men who in their turn would lie even so, and be buried and replaced—men who now were in England perhaps, sleeping quietly, useful, kindly men. Gradually his mind, numbed with the bitterness of it all, grew dull, and he found himself looking curiously at the blades of grass, and then the trees, and the sweep of the ground. A tiredness of everything crept over him, and he wished to be

laid away, in the earth, and finish with the whole rotten business. . . .

And then—something broke the quiet. He hardly listened to it at first, but he became conscious of an extraordinary beauty somewhere. A sound, very sweet and clear, rippled out through the night. He looked towards the wood and saw only the torn, dying trees, but it was from there that the sound came, glorious and triumphant.

“Gad,” he said, “a nightingale.”

The sound stopped, but the subaltern sat on. He sat until dawn broke, behind the trees, and watched the light spring, it seemed, out of the shattered earth and the grey mists. First the clouds were tinted and glowed with a fresh radiance, and then morning swept over the whole land. A little breeze blew faint scents and freshness round the subaltern and he looked up into the liquid sky and smiled.

“There is no death,” he said aloud.

Then he remembered. “Damn! I missed the ‘Stand-to,’” but he laughed at his misdoing, and laughed again when a little covey of bullets went whizzing over his head, as he crawled back towards the trench to another day of war.

Madame Defarge

Madame Defarge

THE men called her "Auntie," but the name we knew her by suited her equally well.

Every day she used to sit—and, for all I know, still sits—in her little vegetable shop, knitting resolutely and muttering beneath her breath. Her muttering is an accompaniment to her busy needles, and she repeats the same refrain from every row of stitches, much as the devout repeat a prayer for every bead upon their rosaries. But with her it is always the same prayer—or curse. "Les Boches . . . sales Boches . . . sacrés Boches . . ." ; and then, as climax—" . . . ce Guillaume." No word, no epithet, just "ce Guillaume."

However much in a hurry you may be, you must always wait for the grim old

lady to finish her row and her refrain before she will attend to you, and even then, though her talk is of the merits of her cabbages, her mind, you feel, still heaps maledictions on the enemy. Whence it is not surprising that some less illiterate subaltern called her "Madame Défarge," and that the name, once given, remained.

Her little shop lies in a town some few miles behind the British line. Signs of war lie everywhere—houses ruined or deserted, the big square empty of all save passing troops, the English khaki wherever one may look, and not a roof or wall but is pock-marked with shrapnel bullets. At night, when the traffic has ceased to clatter over the cobbles, the sharp rattle of rifles and machine-guns echoes round the sleeping town, and every day there is some new tale of houses shelled. Time after time the inhabitants have been warned to leave, but Madame Defarge still sits in her shop,

knitting and muttering and selling vegetables.

I waited one morning until "ce Guillaume" told me that Madame was free to attend me. She heard my tale of wants in silence, but at the word "melons" she lifted her eyebrows and sniffed.

"It is war-time," she observed.

"I have been noticing that for several days in the trenches," I answered; "but I suppose you mean I must pay exorbitantly for my melon."

"Mon Dieu," said Madame. "You English, you think you can buy everything. But you cannot buy me that William."

"Then you don't like the English?" I asked.

"Like? It's not the time to like. Kill me those Boches and I will honour you. But you English, I do not understand you. Your soldiers they come into my

shop and they buy all that it amuses them to buy. They are good children—but children to a degree. They laugh, they sing, they make love, but——” She shrugged her shoulders.

“At any rate, you cannot call us the ‘cold’ English any more,” I said.

“Cold? But to a degree—to such a point—ah! Me, I have more passion in me than in all your Army. Me. I know how to suffer, to love, to hate. Whom do you hate? Ces sales Boches. Never of the life. Whom do you love? No one. One thing. Pleasure. To amuse oneself, that is all. S’amuser c’est tout . . . tout . . . tout.” How she spat the word out at me. “And you arrive at it. Certes. You amuse yourself while fighting these sacrés Boches. Comment? Est-ce-que je sais moi? You fight gaily. You fight courageously, but you amuse yourselves always. It is for me a thing incompre-

hensible. *La guerre pour moi, c'est une chose——*" She hugged herself together, straining for the word. Twice I thought she would throw out her arms and declaim the fitting epithet, but it baffled her.

While waiting for the word I heard the low hissing of a shell, and I ducked from force of habit. The explosion shook the house a little, and I glanced at Madame Defarge. But she, good lady, having failed to find her word, had taken up her knitting again and was expressing herself in her own accustomed fashion. Then another and another shell burst, and Madame, having finished her line, thought fit to reassure me.

"*Ceux ne sont que des obus,*" she said.

"You don't mind them?" I asked.

"Those are not my shells," she answered. "When my obus comes for me I shall not have time to mind. Meanwhile——" she

shrugged her shoulders and continued her knitting.

“So we amuse ourselves even while fighting, and we are cold and we throw our money about, and yet the men call you ‘Auntie.’”

Madame Defarge’s head jerked up, and her little black eyes took me sharply to task. “What does that mean?” she demanded.

“‘Auntie’ means ‘ma tante,’ and is a word of affection. I shouldn’t be surprised if you spoiled our men,” I said.

“Moi? Jamais de la vie. They have no sense. Is it that I know why they call me that word? It is a bêtise. Is it that you will taste everything in my shop?”—this by way of counter-attack.

“Everything,” I answered, and as I proceeded to the plums the door burst open.

“’Ello, Auntie, old girl, ’ows yerself?”

Portez bon ? Bon affair ? Hey ? Got any of those pommes left ? Pomme. Pomme. Yes, that's the ticket," they said, as Madame drew a bagful of apples from beneath the counter and gave them to the men. "She's kept them for us. Vous êtes un angel, madame—compree ? Flap flap wings up there in 'eaven. You're looking beaucoup swank, to-day. Jolie. Merci beaucoup. Oh revoir," and they departed suddenly, having caught sight of me tasting the plums, but Madame Defarge was blushing.

"But they are such children," she said, shrugging one shoulder, as she does when she excuses her own actions. In dealing with the ways of this world she shrugs them both.

I finished my plum and began collecting my purchases, while Madame watched me, fingering her knitting nervously, the very image of guilt.

“But they are such children,” she said again, “and if they have no passions they have good hearts. They——”

“But I never accused them,” I said. “You accuse them, and—spoil them. Answer me that.”

But Madame had no answer, and only looked miserably at her knitting.

“I only wonder,” I continued, “that you permit yourself to be defended by—children.”

“Mon ami,” said Auntie, laying her hand on my arm, “we do not understand you, but we have full—immense confidence in you. God bless the English.” Then “Boches . . . sales Boches . . . sacrés Boches . . . ce Guillaume,” muttered Madame Defarge in a frenzy of knitting.

The Runaway

The Runaway

THE sky was blue and hot. The ground, dappled with sunlight where the leaves let through little chinks of the outside glare, was warm and comfortable. Altogether the wood was a good place that afternoon. It screened us from too much sun and from too much German ; so we lay in it, and sniffed the warm scents, and smoked and happily discussed the hunting prospects of next winter, when the war would be won and over.

The birds sang on. The sun, working round to a gap on our flank, streamed through and overpowered us with laziness. The Hun was good and quiet. One by one wisps of smoke faded away from pipes that one by one fell unheeded to the

ground. Hunting prospects waned, the world grew vaguer and lazier, and then—we woke and found ourselves already scrambling on instinct for our trench.

“Wump-wump-wump-wump-wump”—in the distance the German guns at work.

“Ee-ee-ee-ee”—the shells screaming over in their thousands, crackling and whistling. From the noise you expect to see the sky a maze of wires, with shells hurtling along them, like trams, for the sky is in tumult, and you look and see nothing. Then—chaos and pandemonium when the shells burst.

I sat in my dug-out while the bombardment lasted, and tried to read a book. There was nothing else to do. The trenches that were being shelled lay behind us to our right, for we were at the apex of a salient. We could do nothing, and we could see nothing. We could only feel the quick tremors of the earth and the

sharp blasts of air. The book dealt with fashionable London, and every now and then I found my thoughts wandering up and down those old familiar streets, thronged and vivacious as they would be then on that sunny afternoon, but the guns, thundering madly in bursts that seemed almost hysterical, had a way of bringing my thoughts in a fluster to the front again.

Suddenly there was a crash on the roof of my dug-out, and I waited for the explosion.

When none came I scrambled out to see by what miracle the shell had failed to blow us all to bits. But there was no shell, only a soldier, bleeding and torn and bathed in sweat, staring at me over the parados.

For a moment we stared at each other—I too astonished, and he too breathless, to speak.

“What are you doing there?” I said at last.

“Doing?” he gasped. “Doing? Gawd knows—I don’t!”

“’Spect ’e’s an angel they’re telling about,” said one of my men, “dropped from ’eaving.”

“’Ell,” said the man. “It’s ’ell I’ve come from,” and he jerked his thumb towards the bombarded line.

Meanwhile he lay on the roof of my dug-out, and while he panted for lost breath glared at us as though we were his enemies. He looked as I should imagine an animal at bay looks—his jaw was set and a sort of savage terror in his eyes.

He was short and plump, and looked as if he had lived too long on a chair, possibly behind the counter in a London back street. Even the latter months of training had not quite eradicated that

look, and the effort of his long run had made his cheeks blotchy.

“ ’Ow did yer come, matey ? ” asked a man.

“ Runned,” said the stranger.

“ Then this ain’t no place for you,” remarked Private Piggott. “ They’ll be ’aving a shot at us byembye, then you’ll catch it again. What d’yer come ’ere for ? ”

“ ’Cos I ’ad the wind up, proper,” said the stranger.

There was silence at this, until one man said, “ Don’t wonder at it.”

The fellow was looking at us now with less hostility, but with a greater anxiety. The men’s flippancy was beginning to act on his panic like a douche. I believe his anxiety was to discover what had made him so unlike the rest.

“ They killed my mates,” he said presently ; “ blew ’em ter bits, right by me, same as I’m talking ter you now. Alf

Strange and Dungy Cox. 'Tisn't right. Might 'ave blown me, too, all ter bits. Me. Me." He paused, suddenly amazed at his being in such a place. "Wot am I doing in this 'ere show? They're killing 'em by the 'undreds, as though we was a lot of — animals."

"Oh, cork it up, matey," said a man, not unkindly.

The stranger looked at him a moment and continued, not by way of excuse but as fact: "I was all right, I was, till they did in my pals. Then suddenly, I found myself running. Jest ran, I did, and ran. Tore myself all over with them branches and bushes. Didn't look where I was going—jest ran. Gawd, they're shelling us to blazes there! Couldn't stand it. 'Ad blooming well enough. 'Opped it."

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" they asked.

“Dunno,” said the man, and he stood up on the parados. A hail of bullets whizzed past him, but he seemed too dazed to notice them.

“Get down,” I said, “or you’ll be shot.”

“Oh, this ain’t nothing to that,” and again he jerked his thumb. “Getting ’em pushed into ’em, they are.” But he got down.

“Why ’aven’t you chucked away yer blooming foosil ?” asked Piggott. “You’ll be able to run better without it next time.”

The stranger looked down and found he was still clutching his rifle.

“No,” he said, “never noticed it. Should ’ave chucked it away if I ’ad. Jest shows.” He shut the cut-out and worked the bolt. “No ’arm done,” he said. “Must be going.”

“Where to ?” asked my sergeant. He is a fat little man with round black eyes,

and he knows his job—mine, too, on occasions.

“They’ll be giving my mates double ’ell, presently,” said the stranger, more to himself than to us. “And then they’ll attack.” He stood up, and the bullets again pinged about him, but he seemed unconscious of them. “I’m off,” and he turned away.

“Where to?” repeated my sergeant. He had his revolver ready.

The man turned and gave us, what the old regulations called, “a look of contempt”—a very punishable offence.

“Why, back to my pals, of course. Cheero, mates!” and with his rifle at the trail, he trotted through the sunny wood towards the hell awaiting him.

The Epic of Trooper Kinnaird

The Epic of Trooper Kinnaird

“Trooper Kinnaird returned from war,
With the Flanders mud on his boots and breeches. . . .”

THAT was the beginning of the epic, and it went on for weeks; maybe it still persists, handed down from draft to draft, until now its origin is forgotten, and Trooper Kinnaird has become a legendary hero. Even in those days his adventures were enough to fill several Odysseys.

I was attached to a battalion and heard the beginning of it. On our way to the front line the communication trench was blocked, and while we waited, a private said to his mate :

“D’ye remember Jock Kinnaird ?”

“Aye, yon chatty fellow to t’ saw-mills.”

“ He was ’ome on pass, and telling ’em all manner of tales.”

“ What’s ’e in ? ”

“ Oh, naething, joost Cavalry. Tripper Kinnaird, he calls ’isself. Ye shuld joost ’ear the tales he’s telling. He doesn’t seem to mind war. Happen he likes it. And the noomber of Alleymons he’s killed, though ’e always calls ’em ’Uns. Oh, he’s a devil.”

By the time we moved on the epic had started. It became a stock-pot for humour, into which nameless poets threw their inspiration, and Private Gracey blended them all together in one great song.

He was the battalion’s Homer. At night or during quiet portions of the afternoon, there would be a sudden murmur along the trench and “Tripper” Kinnaird would return from war, with the Flanders mud on his boots and breeches,

and more wondrous tales to tell. We got sight of him at times :

“Tripper Kinnaird were’nt much to look at :
A little, bunchy fellow, all ears and nose,
And a mouth several sizes too small,
Which didn’t prevent ’im talking all the same.
To look at he wasn’t very likely.
Must ’ave joined when they were hard up for men.
Joined the cushee cavalry, because of ’is reputation ;
Always was a ’orsy kind of fellow in publics,
And ’ad to live up.”

There were, however, only two or three men in the battalion who had ever seen Kinnaird, so the description of him must not be taken as exact. At first he was a target for their sarcasm, a figure on which they hung all the mock-heroics of war, a fantastic parody of the newspapers.

“Setting ’is spurs to ’is milk-white steed,
He jumped over the trenches and the barbed wire,
Laughing and shouting : ‘Are we downhearted?
No !’
And took the German Army in the rear ;
The ’ole German Army, von Kluck, the Kaiser, and
Little Willie,
As they were sitting down to their breakfast.

But jest as 'e was finishing the whole bluggy war,
Up comes Sergeant-Major, and asks 'im what the 'ell
 'e's doing,
Who gave 'im orders, who does 'e think 'e is?
Gives 'im a right turn, and sends 'im 'ome under
 escort.
So Tripper Kinnaird wrote to 'John Bull' about it,
But 'is letter got pinched by the censor."

At another time he saves the British line :

"The whole place was being bombarded cruel,
And bits of men were flying about like sparks ;
But Tripper Kinnaird was just as light-'earted as
 ever—
A regular chip of the old block.
When Fritz attacked he just ran down the trench,
Firing rapid with all the foosils 'e found lying
 about,
Killing hundreds, and letting on that 'e was a whole
 Army Corps.
Most 'e frightened off, but a couple of 'undred
Rushed into the trench just as 'e got to the end.
There wasn't no traverses left owing to bombard-
 ment,
So 'e loosed off a machine-gun and killed the lot,
Enfiladed 'em proper. The General put 'im down
 for a V.C.,
But the recommendation got mixed up with an
 indent for a new cap,
Which 'e couldn't wear, as 'is head 'ad got too big."

But after a while, the strain of inventing dramatic deeds for the trooper became wearisome, and they made him live their own trench-life, put him on fatigues, worried him with flies, scared him with rats, pictured him sitting, stripped to the waist, bending over his "grey-back,"

"A little, bunchy fellow, all ears and nose"

(for lines recurred with true Homeric aptness), waging the eternal campaign against what have been called "the minor horrors of war." The poet, however, was quite frank and damned them for what they were—"lice":

"Bluggy beasts, taking the edge off everything.

Never let you be. Not like good old Fritz.

'E 'as 'is bit of sleep, and a smoke, and strafes us regular.

But them bluggy beasts never seem to 'ave 'eard of
Trade Unions,

Or eight-hour bills; just worry you all day long,

And all night.

That's what war is, bluggy little things like that.

And as for 'ate, why, they carry on worse than my
old missus,

The way she manages to 'ate the Alleymon."

This, I felt, was bathos for the hero, but worse was to come. Trooper Kinnaird, their gay desperado, still achieved the marvellous at times, when his chroniclers were in an extravagant mood, but often he was just one of themselves, a lay figure, to whom they could impute those feelings which they were shy of admitting in themselves.

“ Tripper Kinnaird ’ad to go over the top one night,
And ’e went over with ’is eyes ’alf out of ’is ’ead.
’Adn’t been over the top like that before, all by
 ’isself,
To tell the listening posts to come in.
’E crawled on ’is belly, like an old snake,
Feeling as though Fritz couldn’t ’elp spotting ’im
Up there in the open, with nothing protecting ’im.
Every now and then a flare ’ud go up
And ’e’d lie there, sweating for the dark.
Once ’e put ’is hand on something, that went all
 pulpy.
A flare went up and ’e lay down flat as flat,
And looked to see what ’e was lying on, so pally.
Some old Alleymon, what ’ad been killed months
 back.
Tripper Kinnaird felt sort of funny all over.
Wished to God ’e ’adn’t come to the war.

Couldn't see what call 'e 'ad to leave the saw-mills
And lie on a stinking German, out in the open,
With a lot of Alleymons waiting to do 'im in.
Tripper Kinnaird didn't like being alone, and wished
'e was back to th' trench.
Felt all goosey and wondered where the listening
post was.
Didn't care what 'appened to 'im, 'oped they'd kill
'im straight,
So got up and walked, and didn't feel scared any
more."

After this episode there was a recrudescence of the heroic, and it was while he was bombing whole regiments to bits, that I left the battalion to rejoin my own unit. And as it happened, I never saw it again.

I did, however, meet Private Gracey. He was sitting in the Park, in hospital blue, and I was home on leave. I asked him about everybody, and he told me that most were dead.

"And Trooper Kinnaird?" I asked.

He laughed. "Don't know, sir," he said. "Likely they've found something else now to amuse 'em. The lad 'isself, sir,

got killed when you was up to trenches last winter.”

“How?” I asked.

“Just a stray bullet, sir. . . . He was a chap like the rest of us.”

As Seen from Frederick (Aug. 1915)

As Seen from Frederick (Aug. 1915)

BEYOND the parapet the world is, more or less, unknown. You have the feeling that your trench is the limit of your nation and its power—an outpost of empire. There is a little strip of No-Man's-Land, and then the enemy in his outpost of empire. If you show yourself, he kills you; so you don't show yourself. You live most of your days seeing only the two walls of the trench and the sky, and when you do look over, or go out at nights to see your little world, your horizon even then is only some hundred yards away.

You see by day a ragged field, pitted with shell-holes, in each of which there is always a bully-beef tin. The grass is lank and untidy, where it has been allowed to

grow. There are some bodies lying stiffly about, the skin dark brown from exposure, and the clothes rotten. There is a look of a refuse heap about the field. Even the barbed wire, mended and strengthened in the darkness, helps the impression of disuse. Beyond this No-Man's-Land you see a low line of sand-bags—coloured sand-bags. And that is all. What is happening behind those sand-bags you can only guess. If all is quiet, you feel that "old Fritz is getting something ready up his sleeve." If things are "unhealthy" in your trench, you know that it is always Fritz, smug, grinning Fritz, behind those sand-bags, indulging in a fit of hate.

In after years we will remember the dramatic moments, but at the best of times it is the boredom of war that is its chief quality. At the worst of times it is sickening. But it is the German who is killing one's friends, and there he lurks, an

invisible enemy, plotting, scheming, inventing somewhere across No-Man's-Land. Beyond that horizon of low coloured sand-bags is the unknown, the land of menace, and the land not of people, but of the Enemy, the destroyers of the world.

But to break the monotony of our view, there was once something that we could see behind our lines, a tall chimney standing gaunt against the sky. From the trenches we used to watch the Boches' attempts to knock it down with much the same air of amused detachment that one watches a yokel having shies at an Aunt Sally. Somehow it was impossible for us to treat it to any grave concern. Like the British Army itself in those days, its very existence was a piece of impertinence. It should have been utterly destroyed long ago.

We knew that it annoyed the Boche exceedingly. Whenever our guns did any

particularly useful bit of work, the Germans would promptly retaliate by bombarding Frederick, which was the name by which, for some unconsidered reason, we called it. Officially, I believe, he was known as Number 6, but then officially we had no relations with him. He was merely a distraction for us, a subject for small bets, small jokes, and a considerable source of pride. The German shells blustered and crashed around, stormed and bit the dust, but had no effect at all on Frederick, except that something once chipped a few bricks out of his very top, which gave an amusing touch of rakishness to his appearance. But Frederick the essential, Frederick the Observation Post, remained as debonair as ever.

There were times, I admit, when he annoyed us. If you bestow pet names on an inanimate object, as people do in the

trenches so as to create a kind of pleasant homeliness—by way of reaction, I suppose—and if you invest it also with a certain personality, there must be times when that fixed personality strikes a jarring note. Our trenches in those days were called Peace Trenches, for our daily casualty list was small compared with regiments in other parts of the line. But though the Germans restrained themselves from any extreme expressions of hate, they used us as tasters for any new diet they might concoct. Their favourite dish at that time was the plum-pudding, and they fed us with it *ad nauseam*.

We had not, in those days, learnt how to dig. Our dug-outs were merely shelters covered with corrugated iron and sand-bags, and although we could generally see the plum-pudding in time to dodge it during the day, there was no security at night. It annoyed one, too, at any time,

to dash wildly round a traverse and see the fruit of care and anxious theft blown to little atoms, so that though one was alive oneself, one's little earthy home had gone to glory—if indeed there is a Valhalla for dug-outs. It certainly exasperated one, emerging sadly from the wide-cast debris, to see Frederick, cock-a-hoop Frederick, standing there, insolently quizzing the whole catastrophe. For Frederick was never sympathetic, his attitude was always one of mockery. I can imagine how the Germans must have loathed him.

I climbed up Frederick one day. I had gone, in the matter of a bet, to see how near the last bombardment had been to him. The earth all around was pitted with holes, and in one a middle-aged subaltern was sitting, sketching a moody cow, whom no one thought fit to take away.

“Difficult things—cows,” said the subaltern, looking up. “Special anatomy of

their own. Like goats. Great fun—sketching. Ever tried it? Splendid thing out here. I'm an architect, you know, but they haven't left many houses for me to draw—the brutes. Funny thing. Built houses all my life—I'm forty-two, you know, but I told 'em thirty-nine—and now I'm engaged in knocking 'em down. Like to see me knock down a house? We're strafing a farm in twenty minutes. Come up jolly old Frederick and watch."

He led me down into a little tunnel which ran to the chimney's base. Inside Frederick were iron rungs about two and a half feet apart, by means of which we had to pull ourselves up. It was a stiff pull, but the middle-aged subaltern ran up them like a monkey. I followed slowly, panting and very fearful.

"Come on, old bird," said my companion from the top, "or you'll miss the show."

I struggled up, hit my head against a

trap-door, through which I eventually squeezed, and found myself in a small signal station. The subaltern had gone still higher, whither I followed him through another trap-door.

“Now, cocky, let me show you the best view of trench life in the whole of France,” and he pulled away a brick to make room for his telescope.

It was a hot, peaceful day in August, and the country below us shimmered in the heat, a pleasant land, well wooded and with gentle undulations of ground to break the monotony of sky-line. For the most part there was no sign of war. In the distance I could see farm carts moving about with hay, or reapers cutting the corn, while immediately below me a pedlar was trudging along a dusty lane, while a dog followed dragging wares in a little cart. To the east, as far as I could see, ran a lazy river and here and there men

were bathing, their clean white bodies glowing freshly in the sunlight. But straight across the land, from north to south, as though some gigantic engine had passed, cutting deep, narrow ruts with its wheels and laying waste all beneath and around it, lay the track of war. The track itself was narrow, some hundred yards or so, but it ran as plain as any road from one horizon to the other, utterly shorn of every living thing.

On either side of this track, or No-Man's-Land, lay the trenches, and in them we could plainly see men moving. On one side there were men in khaki, on the other—in grey uniforms. But whatever the colour of their clothes, they were all doing the same things. The grey men, perhaps, were busier. I could see little groups of men digging, resting, carrying loads, cooking meals, filling sand-bags, or washing their shirts in the river which curved con-

veniently at the point where it broke the line. In the front-line trenches it was harder to observe, they seemed more furtive there. Still, I could guess. Somebody was singing Tipperary or the Weserlied, others were sucking pencils over polite letters to Gretchens or Mary Anns, while on the fire-step some Bert or 'Eneery was keeping half an eye open in case Fritz should start any games, and on his side Fritz was returning the compliment, only a little more punctiliously.

It was a new aspect of war and I remember my surprise. The country beyond the sand-bags had suddenly changed its personality. I could see into that land of menace at last, and I found this threatening enemy calmly sitting behind his barrier of Empire—darning socks. But the allegory was quickly broken.

“Plum-pudding,” exclaimed my companion.

We saw our men in one place suddenly bob wildly along a trench. Then I saw a dark round object fall heavily. In a moment there was a burst of debris, like a sudden dust-storm. Then the summer quiet reigned again.

“Ha—ha,” laughed my companion. “Funny fellow, Fritz. You can see well from here, can’t you? There’s another,” and he laughed again. He was the very essence of Frederick.

“They’re going to fire now, sir,” a voice called up from the signal station.

The subaltern’s keenness suddenly changed from boyish enjoyment to intense efficiency. He gave me his glasses, took the telescope, and became deeply absorbed.

“Ready,” he shouted, and we heard the message passed down the telephone.

A gun cracked behind us, a shell whistled past and suddenly a little round

white cloud sprang into being near the farm—merely shrapnel for ranging.

“Twenty minutes right,” said the subaltern. “Add twenty-five.”

The next cloud—like a sudden ball of cotton-wool—appeared to me to be too far over, but the subaltern reported “O.K.” Then the guns opened out in earnest.

The first seemed to burst right on the farm, but did no damage except send a German scuttling out. He did not go far, for a second shell, missing the farm, swept him away in a cloud of dust. The two following made gaps in a little bunch of trees, that already looked very barren for the time of year, and then suddenly the house exploded. To me there seemed no reality about it. I heard no shell. The farm, at one moment so quiet among its bare trees, just exploded. An immense volume of smoke carried away the roof.

Then the walls, hesitating a little, collapsed inwards. After a little the dust cleared and only a sturdy chimney-stack could be seen, to mark the spot among the dying trees.

“That’s riled them,” said my companion. “Good work, what?”

I chuckled, for the farm had been a nuisance to us—a malignant fortress for machine-guns from which we could never get away. In fact, I had never even thought of it before as a farm.

“Now it’s our turn,” said the subaltern.

He had hardly spoken before a German shell came whistling towards us—also a shrapnel to get our range. It burst high and very wide.

“Rotten,” said the subaltern. He was just like a boy on a pier waiting for a wave to splash up and wet him. For myself, I felt intense fright, especially as

the next came much nearer. I was used to being shelled on the ground, but this paralysed me. I don't know why, but the feeling of being thrown to the ground terrified me even more than the usual prospect of being blown off it. I felt that I was being held up high in the air as a target for all the German guns.

Then suddenly it struck me that the fellows in the trenches were watching the bombardment of Frederick and were betting . . . and I lost my temper.

Between the bursts of shell the subaltern talked gaily.

“Must be good fun knocking down chimneys. When I lived in town there was a chimney across the river that annoyed me, covered with electric advertisements that worried me all night.”

● “Oh, shut up.” I said, and as I spoke a shell burst close—very close—to the

chimney's base, so close that Frederick shivered and seemed to bend.

We waited a moment, clutching the narrow walls, which still trembled a little.

“Six,” said the subaltern. “That’s all for the day. They never fire more, thank God.”

He said the last two words in a changed voice, and I glanced at him. He looked very old, very tired—but only for a second.

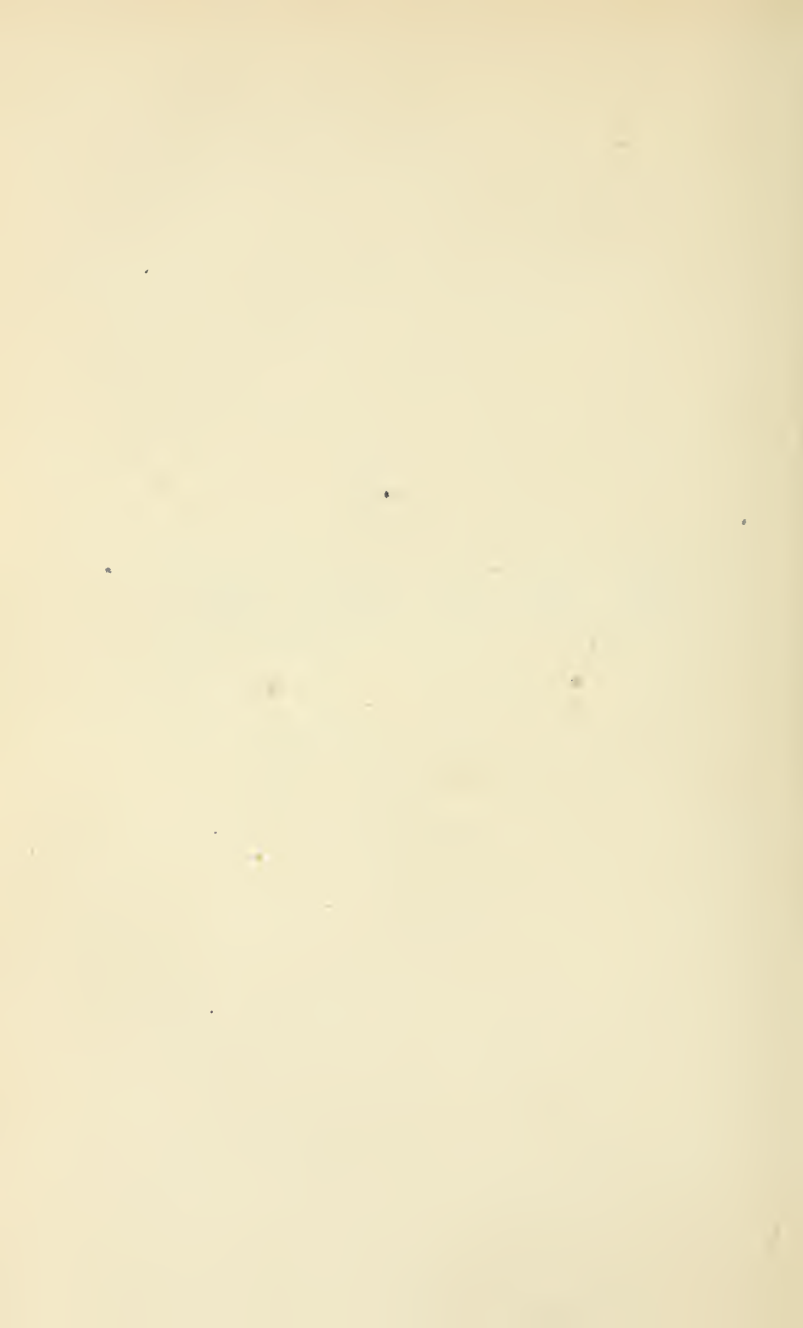
“Come on, old sport,” he said with a laugh, “let’s go and see where it fell.”

We clambered down slowly, and found a hole a yard or two from the chimney.

The subaltern whistled, and glanced up to the height from which we had climbed. Then he patted the walls of “jolly old Frederick” and laughed again.

“They haven’t got us yet, have they, old son of a gun?”

The Diary of a Timid Man



The Diary of a Timid Man

Friday, September 24th, 1915.

IT was very hot that afternoon and we sat in the shadow of a wood, watching the slow traffic of the valley, and thinking quietly, man by man.

Before going into action one runs through the whole gamut of emotions. That afternoon we knew them all. Below us lay the valley, warm and quiet and dusty, with the peasants going to the river for water, and girls standing at doorways laughing, and carts creaking, and everywhere, over all, the hot sun drenching the world with carelessness, so that even the dogs could do little else but snap at passers-by, and then sink back into the pleasant dust. To look at it the world was good and comfortable. It was

the bombardment roaring eternally in the east that brought us to reality.

It is as well that one cannot remain long in the power of any emotion. I remember now how quickly one followed another. Sometimes I felt sick at the thought of leaving all the sunniness to be swept away perhaps in a shell-burst, and I envied the dirty monotonous lives of those peasants there. And then, almost in the same train of thought, it seemed a fine end to "go out" cleanly, charging perhaps, one moment a man, splendid with the joy of riding, young, enjoying life to the full, without the broken hopes of those poor peasant folk, and the next moment — a shock and all ended. Sometimes the little valley woke memories of England, longings for the old familiar roads and hills, and, with them, people and little scenes long since forgotten, and then at the same time, or following it so closely

that I scarcely realized the reaction, I found myself glad to be doing this much for those hills and people. All these feelings, I remember, came running through my head in a kind of poetry, which I never even tried to make to rhyme—incoherent bits of emotion, that written down would certainly have been doggerel, but coming spontaneously they acted as a drug and so I let them “carry on.” And I suppose we all were thinking much the same, for everyone was very silent that afternoon. I only know that all the time I was at heart afraid, and sometimes my fear was uppermost and sometimes a kind of thankfulness.

The men were different, they always are, and the whole wood rang with “jiggety - jig,” “K.R.R.’s,” “Top of the House” and all the hundred mystifying names of Soldiers’ Loto. Some played on mouth organs, others told in-

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credible reminiscences of India, or argued, and one man I saw, sitting at the edge of the wood, playing serenades to the world on a penny whistle.

The Brigadier came to see us, and called up all the officers. He was a big man with steady eyes and a determined jaw. When he finished a sentence his jaw came up and closed tight on it. He looked at us hard some time before he spoke that afternoon, while the bombardment thundered like a hurricane in the distance.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “I just want to say a few words about to-morrow. Most of you have had a rotten bad time since last November. You’ve had to forget that you’re cavalry men, and play at infantry work in the trenches. Well, to-morrow’s going to be the day of your lives. You’re going to smash through.” His jaw clinched that matter very thoroughly. “Right through. And the

25th of September will be a day you'll all look back on with pride for the rest of your lives. At least," he said, looking at us very steadily, "many of you will not. And that brings me to what I want to say. If you see your best pal wounded—carry on. If you see your best pal killed—carry on. And I think, gentlemen, the cavalry spirit, the spirit of dash and gallantry, is as strong in you as it ever was. No matter what losses there may be, and you'll have pretty bad ones, I want you to feel that the glory of to-morrow will be one of the finest in the pages of history. Huh!" And he set his jaw and looked hard at us.

The Brigadier was one of the few men who could make such a speech ring true. Consciously or unconsciously we all stood stiff, threw out our chests, and set our jaws; and I watched his eyes pass down us with approval. And then suddenly his expression changed, and I looked to see

the cause. It was Seton Richards, a dapper little man who was standing apart. His air was somewhat detached, and he was watching, pensively, the smoke from his cigarette curl up among the branches.

“ Well, Seton Richards, don’t you agree with me,” asked the Brigadier.

Seton Richards started from his reverie. “ Oh, yes, General,” he said in his squeaky little voice, “ there’s a great deal in what you say. But, all the same, I can’t help feeling —there’s —only —one —Seton —Richards.”

But the Brigadier is the hero of this story, for he laughed, knowing his man.

Saturday, September 25th.

We saddled up and “ stood to ” some hours before dawn. Yesterday’s heat had broken in a thunderstorm, and now the wood was cool and fresh and there was a comforting smell of wet undergrowth.

The doubts of the day before had passed with the heat, and everyone was excited. We had heard the infantry go singing up the road all night, and now we waited for a lull in the firing to know when their attack should begin. Dawn came slowly, to the roll of the bombardment. We looked round our horses, slackened girths and fell out to make breakfast. Then suddenly we heard the shelling stop, and everyone said, "Now they've gone over," and became very silent.

At about nine o'clock the order came to move, and in a few minutes we were clattering down a little lane towards the line. We moved quickly and all the inhabitants came running out to see us go by, and wave to us and shout encouragement. Everyone was in high spirits, and one of the men shouted, "Finée Alley-mon" to the peasants, and they laughed and cried, "Bonne chance."

We halted in a park and started watering, but were off again before a quarter of the horses had had a drink. At Nœux-Mines we halted again, and the town-folk came rushing out with buckets filled, so that within ten minutes we were able to move on. Everyone was full of stories. The German line, they said, was utterly broken, we had captured thousands of prisoners, only the cavalry was needed now to go in and finish the rout. And here we were, the cavalry, going in.

“Les voilà,” cried the peasantry, as though we were the final proof of victory. “Hourra.”

Soldiers, waiting in reserve, grunted their blessing. “Good ole ’airies. Give ’em socks.”

There were wounded, too, coming back in ambulances and they sat up to cheer us on. But it was the sight of a long line of German prisoners marching sullenly

down the road that put most heart into us.

Our two brigades separated and in long columns jingled across the little plain. The sun was shining, and the world still smelt fresh after the storm. The horses, feeling our excitement, tossed their heads, danced and sprayed us with foam. The men rode easily, laughing and prophesying about Christmas in Blighty. Here and there one could hear them cursing their horses—happily.

“Won’t be so much ginger about you, when we’ve finished with Fritz,” said a man, tugging against a pack-horse.

Billy S—— came cantering up in high fettle, and pulled in beside me. Like his horse, he was foaming at the mouth.

“We’ve got ’em absolutely beat,” he said. “Official. Just seen Haig.”

“Then you will die happy. And how is Haig?”

“ Oh, awfully bucked. So am I.” Billy was just nineteen. “ I’m doing galloper. This is my third horse already. I’ll tell you some more sometime,” and he cantered on.

A staff officer galloped up to know if we were the end of the column.

“ What news ? ” I asked.

“ Oh, great,” he said. “ You lucky devils, you’re for it. Cavalry in action. What a dream.”

“ Bluddy nightmare for the Alleymon,” came from behind.

“ How far on are the trenches ? ” I asked.

“ Oh, about a mile. That’s Vermelles, there,” and he pointed to a shattered village on our left. “ Cheery ho. Good hunting.”

A few minutes later it was passed down that we had captured Loos, then Hulluch, then that the Germans were in full

retreat. There was a crest of hill separating us from the fighting, but we could almost hear how it was going by the firing. There came a time when no guns spoke at all, and we felt in the words of the inevitable humorist, that "Fritz had remembered 'is sausidges at 'ome."

Below the crest we halted and looked round our horses. News came in from the French. They, too, were doing wonders a few miles to the south. It was a great day. Some prisoners went down the road, and we pulled out our glasses to look at them. We were rather disappointed to find they were fine fellows in their prime. We had thought that after a year of war they had lost all their best men.

"However," said someone, "it only makes our beating them all the better. But what are we waiting for?"

Gradually we heard the shelling begin again, and still we waited, tantalized by

all that was happening over the crest. The sky clouded over, it began to drizzle, and still we waited. A stream of wounded came over the hill, a long stream that never stopped. They trudged by, as best they could, miserable in the wet. Rumours became more and more extravagant, until nobody heeded them. The rain soaked us to the skin, and the horses stood hunched up with their tails tucked in between their legs.

Night came and we cooked some food in a ruined house. Two wounded Highlanders had crawled there and were lying on the floor fast asleep. We sat between them and ate, then went out and slept beside our horses in the rain.

It was the end of the day.

Sunday, September 26th.

The sky cleared during the night and with the sun our spirits rose again. We

did nothing all day except listen to rumours and watch a battery to our left being shelled. In the evening we were formed up on foot, as if for a parade. To our surprise we were marched off towards the firing and were told we were to attack Fosse 8, which had already cost us several thousand men. As we marched through the ruins of Vermelles the Germans shelled us and we lost some men. At last we passed over the crest of the hill and could see the whole front, a line of little twinkly, cracking lights. In the distance someone spotted Fosse 8—a long low slag-heap, which the enemy had fortified. I think we were all too disappointed to care what happened to us, and the Fosse seemed as good a place to go to as any other. And then suddenly the order came for us to return.

We were thoroughly tired when we got back, and rolled into our blankets for a

good rest. When my orderly woke me, I thought I had probably slept for hours and this was the five-o'clock "stand to." Instead we were formed up and I looked at my watch. It was half-past one.

"What's the trouble?" I asked.

"We're going to Loos," said my O.C.

Monday, September 27th.

We marched over the hill towards the captured village in silence. I say we marched, though for the most part we stood or sat in the ditch beside the road, waiting for the traffic in front to move on, or for broken carts to be cleared away.

Onwards from the crest of the hill the country lay, in the moonlight, like the creature of a grim nightmare. The earth was cracked and split out of all semblance of itself, while all about it lay the debris of battle. Carts, horses, limbered wagons, rifles, boxes, long strands of wire and their

broken posts lay shattered and touselled beside the road, and everywhere were bodies. Some were too hopelessly distorted to remind us that yesterday they were as alive as we ourselves ; but others—a boy lying, as a sleeping child, with his hand beneath his cheek, or a Highlander hanging doubled up on some uncut wire, like a rag-doll—these gave one terribly to feel.

We halted once near a man sitting in a ditch, as we all sat from time to time, waiting.

“ Ello,” said one of my men. “ Cheero, matey. Bokoo fatigay ? ”

The man did not answer. The back of his head was shot away, but from the front nothing was noticeable. He was just a sandy-haired man, with a stump of a nose, and a rather despondent face, sitting beside the road—a man, one felt, who might have been a bricklayer in

England with a sandy-haired family, and a wife who kept him tidy.

Fragments of bodies appeared out of fissures in the ground, others had been swept into the ditch to allow for free passage for succeeding troops; for the road was clear, its debris heaped on either side in ungainly piles, like muddy snow when the sweepers have passed.

It was very desolate and quiet; but it was, I think, the silence of that desolation that was most oppressive. Except for the distant fighting and occasional shells that wailed over and burst about the road, it was still, beyond all earthly quiet. The world had been convulsed, and, in the midst of its shattering, suddenly petrified. So it seemed to us, marching down the hill, with the moon shining coldly on the broken ground and the little piles of dead.

We came into Loos at dawn and were

immediately shelled. They had been clearing away the dead there, but a number of bodies still lay about the silent streets. We were halted in the main street, and told to find cellars for ourselves in the ruined houses. In the first house a shell had entered where some dozen Germans had been seated. Fragments of their bodies were littering every cranny of the room. In the courtyard were stretched two Highlanders, whom later we buried where they lay.

In the corner of the yard was a door leading to the cellars, by the side of which on a small black board was painted :

II. Komp.

The cellar was large and arched and into it we packed the men. They were delighted to find a large quantity of German kit and food. The food they tasted and condemned, the kit pleased

them enormously, even those items which they could not understand. There were several numbers of "Simplicissimus" and "Die Jugend" lying about, the jokes of which I translated for the benefit of G——. The men listened and were very much amused. "Why, I've seen that joke in one of our papers," said a man; "just like their sauce to pretend they're winning." We had some German tinned meat for breakfast—a kind of Wiener Schnitzel, and some coffee, too, which we found. The latter was very good, but the men preferred their own black tea. On the walls the enemy had written their names, and one had added a verse, probably of his own composition :

" Gebt uns Lohnung,
Gebt uns Essen,
Dann ist der Krieg
Bald vergessen."

The men were delighted with this.

" Bet we've given 'em something now

to fresh up their memories with," said Private Piggott.

A mile to the east of us the battle was still thundering, and still more shells were falling in the village. However, we were in reserve and managed to snatch a few hours' sleep.

A man came downstairs and said a Frenchman wanted something or other. I went up and found an old peasant watching the tiles come slithering off the roof where a shrapnel had just hit it.

He turned to me with a courteous bow and said: "Monsieur l'officier . . ."

I motioned him towards the shelter of a barn which was being used as a dressing station.

He looked up at the sky quizzingly, and shook his head. "Ceux ne sont que des obus," he said, as though he spoke of a passing shower, but followed, to humour me.

He had come, he said, in the matter of a mare, her foal and a mule. Because of the battle he had not fed them for two days. He made a gesture towards the havoc and smiled. He gave me the impression that he had been unwilling to interfere with the battle—par complaisance. He then asked for my permission to feed his animals now, which, naturally, I gave. He thanked me very politely and departed.

The dressing station was very quiet. No one spoke except the doctors.

“Just hold up your arm a little. That’s right. Hurting? Pain you to breathe? No? Excellent. Hullo, just hold up this fellow’s arm a minute. Gently.” This to me.

He cut all the clothes away around the shoulder and chest. The man had fainted. His side seemed to me to have been all blown away, but the doctor saw nothing in it.

“Lungs all right—by a miracle. He’ll do. Looks worse than it is.”

For the next man he did not need my help. The man was dying.

“Can’t think why the stretcher-bearers didn’t take this fellow’s leg off up there,” he said, as he passed to a third. “There’s only a thread or two holding it,” and these he cut with a small knife.

The patient opened his eyes and smiled. “Told ’em they ought to. But they didn’t take no notice of me. Offered ’em my own knife, too. Stretcher-bearers think too much of themselves ; always ’ave said.”

When I went out I found a cart rumbling across the yard. A mare was harnessed to it, and a foal and a mule tied to it behind. My friend the peasant was driving. I stopped him and asked where he was going.

“To Carvin, monsieur l’officier, to get fodder.”

Now Carvin was well behind the German lines, moreover, the road there, before ever it left the village, was swept by a German machine-gun.

“You’re mad,” I said. “Why do you think our battle doesn’t affect you?”

“Mais si, monsieur l’officier,” said the old man, deprecating my rudeness. “As a good patriot it affects me to the heart. But always I go to Carvin, and the Boches always say, ‘Oh, it is only Jean Bartel,’ they know me and my mare and her foal and the mule. They have never interfered.”

A light shell came whizzing down the street and burst on the cobbles just outside the gateway, sending a vicious spray of atoms all about. The mare shied.

“Mais dis donc, ma petite,” said Monsieur Bartel in gentle reproof; as she quieted at his voice he said to me:

“If Monsieur l’officier will permit.”

But I would not permit.

He put back his "chariot" and came again, insistent in his courtesy, to ask me where he might get some fodder. Orders had just come in and anyhow it was not my business.

"Oh, where you like," I said, "if you get permission."

He thanked me most politely and went out.

A shell burst in the street a moment later and I looked to see if Jean Bartel was hit. He was walking up the pavement, quite unmoved. Presently he came to a body. He stooped to look at it, then taking off his hat, he crossed himself, and walked quietly on.

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The cellars of Loos were well built and had hitherto resisted the bombardment. In them was a great quantity of German stores and kit, besides about a hundred

of the civil population. In some there were also some Germans. Parties were sent out to search various streets, to collect documents and stores of value, to mark the depôts and to round up the enemy. Above ground the houses contained little except bodies, although in the estaminet at the corner some women were still carrying on business with thirsty hungry soldiers. The streets were empty except for men on duty and the curé, who went about making a list of his surviving parishioners.

It was a warm sunny day, and the bursts of shrapnel above the village looked like small white clouds in the sunshine. Going into the dark cellars after the glare above made it very difficult to see if anyone was hidden there. Silhouetted against the light stairs, a man was quite at the mercy of the Germans below.

The men, however, had no thoughts of

this. They went down gaily and brought out numbers of the terrified enemy. One man unarmed found a party of fifteen. He formed them up in fours and marched proudly at their head down the street. "Ello, 'Erb," shouted a soldier. "Enjoying yerself?" "Would be," said the other, "if I could only make the perishers do the Goose Step."

It interested every one to see how the Germans had lived. On the whole, the inhabitants said, they were orderly, but very dirty. They always preferred to live in the cellars, even during the heat of summer, before Loos was shelled. The cellars were certainly crammed with kit, neatly ranged along the walls. They had gone leaving everything behind, the commandant, it is presumed, in his pyjamas, for his clothes were carefully folded on a chair beside his bed.

But there were objections to staying

long in those cellars. The men soon found a trophy, which appealed to them beyond all else except, of course, a helmet. It was always referred to as "one of those Geggens." I discovered the nature of the trophy and the need for it at much the same time, when, in looking for documents, I came across a small packet, labelled "Gegen die Läuse." I was itching already.

We none of us quite knew which streets were safe from machine-gun fire. The Germans had been driven on to the slopes of the hill covering Loos, and at many unexpected corners we ran into the sharp zip-zip-zip of their bullets, while at no place was one safe from the shelling, which increased as the day wore on.

In the afternoon we heard that attacks were going to be made on the hill, and received orders to go there in support, leaving some men to guard the prisoners.

We marched up the long street towards Hill 70 in shrapnel formation. The shells were bursting fairly frequently all along the road, and the houses which screened our advance were being constantly hit.

On the way I met a figure walking quietly down from the field of battle. Over his shoulder in a large string bag hung a bundle of grass, and he carried a truss of hay, looted from some stable, in his arms. He turned, saluted me with pleasant dignity, then fell in by my side for a few words. "I must warn you, Monsieur l'officier, that there is a great deal of gas about. It is very inconvenient," he said in his slow, careful way. "Gas shells," he added. "Mais la bataille —ça marche toujours. Bon chance, mon lieutenant. Que le bon Dieu vous garde," and Jean Bartel lifted his hat, and walked quietly back to feed his mare and her foal and the mule.

For myself I was very grateful to the little old man. Marching into action is a nervy business at the best of times, and Jean Bartel's indifference was a tonic.

A subaltern, wearing a glengarry, came out of a house, playing with the nose of a shell. He walked a little way with me.

“Going into the show?”

“Yes,” I answered.

“I like seeing you fellows strolling into action. Your gang looks as if they were a lot of poor R.E.'s wandering along. Ever go behind the scenes? Sappers always remind me of stage hands, scene shifters and those beavers. Wander about doing the messy jobs, kind of detached and slightly superior, no truck with the actor fellows. What are you? Machine-guns?”

A shell plonked a few yards in front of us, but did no damage except to the road.

“Always used to think people went into action looking like a lot of devil-may-

cares. Jolly heroic and tough and all that. Real death or glory boys as per the actor fellows at home. I don't know how it is, but the sight of our chaps always makes me laugh. Look at their noses. I always think of people's noses. Just before we went over the top the other day, I looked at my beavers, and somehow their noses made me howl. They looked so damned comic. All sorts of noses, snub ones, fat, bulgy ones, all sorts of stupid shapes. I'm going off here. Cheery ho. Look out for gas."

We passed close by the Tower Bridge—the huge ironwork structure that dominated every corner of the battlefield. There was a rumour very current in the village, that a Landsturm Colonel was still up it, observing for the enemy. Various men were told off to search it, but even if they had tried to climb it, at the best they could only have found

fragments of a body, for before the smoke of one shell had drifted away, another always burst against the steel girders.

Looking back on that march there is little that stands out. I remember my own very real fear—fear more of the unknown towards which we were going, rather than of the shells that burst and missed us. There was also a feeling of the whimsical, caused chiefly by Jean Bartel and the subaltern, with their ways of looking at war. And a feeling of nausea too, at all the havoc, and the bodies beside the road and the ruined houses and the wounded, who came trailing by, and the patient fellows who were carried down on stretchers. There was a tremendous noise going on, but I have an impression of quietness, the quietness of men overwhelming the roar of battle. Nobody seemed at all put out.

A number of gas-shells burst over us.

We stopped to put on our helmets. We had just been given a new issue and the men did not know how to put them on. I had to go round, tucking the ends in under their tunic collars.

“Feel as if I were being dressed up for a Sunday-school treat,” came a grumbling voice from under a mask.

Their chief concern was to know what to do with their caps. I told them to put them on over their gas helmets. The result made the men feel ridiculous, but we marched on, puffing and blowing through the tubes.

“If this is what they call war,” said someone, “give me a —— dog-fight.”

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Up the hill a little beyond the village we could see a barricade across the road, behind which men were standing, while away on either side ran a shallow trench. In this were a large number of soldiers,

working or keeping guard. They did not look in the least concerned about anything, nor did they seem to bear any relation to the piles of dead that lay about the field. The hill curved round to our left, and, as I could tell by our shelling, we were in full view of the German trenches there.

We were just preparing for a dash across the open, when I saw G—— come strolling casually down to meet us.

As I saluted I thought: "How funny to salute in the middle of a battle," and then: "What a funny sort of battle this is." G—— rather gave me the impression that he disapproved of the whole show. It was rather a stupid affair, but since we were there, I'd better take a gun—here he crinkled his upper lip and made his moustache bristle—to a place by the barricade. He would go more to the left with the rest.

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“Some fellows are going to attack up there,” he said, waving his stick slowly towards the hill-top. “And they want us to help. Covering fire. Warm, isn’t it?” but this last referred to the weather. “I’ll take this team up now. You follow, at a decent interval, you know. Come along.”

There really was nothing more to say, so he did not say it, but turned, as slowly as he spoke, and wandered up towards the trench. His gun-team nodded and followed smiling. They were delighted to see the hero of many anecdotes tallying with their descriptions of him. “Why, even when ’is Johnson blows ’im end-ways, ’e’ll travel slow and collected,” a man remarked, jerking his head towards the figure in front.

We walked straight across the open, but the Germans made no attempt to hit us. After a little, the road became sunken, and there we had cover to re-form, as two or

three of my men had been touched with the gas, and I had left them in one of the houses, choking. Then we went on to the barrier and posted a gun near by. There was a regiment of the brigade already there and from them I tried to find out what had happened, and where the Germans were.

We were on the side of the hill—Hill 70—and the German trenches were just over the crest a hundred yards or so away. Our men had been attacking up the hill for the last two days, and another attack was expected soon. No one quite knew what had happened. It was certain that we had routed the Germans at the outset, but the present inaction puzzled everyone. There had been plenty of little attacks, but nothing on a large scale since the first offensive. The Germans had been equally inactive, but no doubt they were preparing to make a big counter-attack.

The ground was littered with our dead and we began to feel something was wrong.

Suddenly everyone cheered up. Over the hill we had come during the night, we saw troops advancing in open order, and everybody said : " Here they come. Now we'll get a move on."

Unfortunately, the enemy could see them as well, if not better than we could, and began shelling them. They lost freely, but the lines came on without faltering. The scene, on the whole, did not encourage us. " They're just chucking us away," said a man, " sending good fellows over the sky-line like that."

It was good, however, to know that there were troops behind us, for the inaction of the enemy made us uneasy. Our trench, cut in the hard chalk, was scarcely waist deep. Moreover, it only ran a little way to the left, then there came a big gap of

half a mile, and although troops were holding the village behind us to cover that gap, the Germans on the hill where it curved round to the north were able to enfilade us in case of an attack. It was a bad position, but we felt sure that our Higher Command had something up its sleeve to clinch the victory. In that case nothing mattered. If, on the other hand, it was just a big fiasco, the future was full of possibilities, and all of them unpleasant. I began to wonder what our position really was, and the sight of the dead in hundreds all about—they somehow reminded me of the heaps of manure you see in a field, ready for scattering—did not encourage me. They looked as though they had been wasted in the moment of victory. Then I heard someone say :

“ Did you ever hear the story of the man who was dying ? ” “ My sons,” he

said, "I've had a great many troubles in my life and most of them never happened."

The anecdote struck me as singularly apt, and I went off to tell it to my men. But they were in no need of any philosophy. They were arguing vehemently about Sheffield United and the Wanderers.

"I was there, meself—I saw them win t' cup," said Private Gazely, his red head appearing over a traverse, as he knelt to dig with his entrenching tools.

"You liar," said another, "you told me yerself.—Oh, anything 'appening, sir? Do you think there's much chance of their attacking, sir?"

"One never knows," I said, and then the fatuousness of my remark struck me. I remember standing there, looking back away from the enemy, into Loos, and cursing myself for making foolish remarks

and for imagining all kinds of vague menaces. I can see the picture still: the village, broken and dishevelled, breaking every here and there into eruptions of smoke and fragments; the Tower Bridge, gaunt and erect against the western sky, with shells bursting and crashing on its girders, till the whole air was filled with the ring of steel. It sounded like a Titanic smithy—the anvil we could see, a hundred feet high, we could hear the swish of the blows and their crash as they hurtled against the framework, see the sparks fly outwards, whole tongues of flame—only the Titan was invisible and I wondered . . . and wondering, cursed myself for being such a fool. One shouldn't wonder, one shouldn't make fatuous remarks, one shouldn't lose confidence, one shouldn't . . .

“There they go,” said someone.

Loos is in a hollow, with the hills

running all round it ; I looked and saw some men advancing from a little wood against the hill east of the village ; our guns had been bombarding that sector for some time, and this then was the attack. It was hard to see what happened. Men ran about unconcernedly, on the whole most ran uphill, but which were fugitive Germans and which the attacking English it was hard to say. They all had a tired, mechanical pace, like cross-country runners, going over a heavy, ploughed field. Those who ran downhill we took for prisoners, at first. But after a while everyone seemed to be coming back down the hill—and we guessed the attack had failed. We were never very excited during the action, for we never were sure as to what was happening. But we were very disappointed over the result.

After a while, we saw some troops come marching up the street towards us. The

Germans shelled them, and once or twice the column seemed to us to be completely overwhelmed by bursts. The Germans had that street marked to an inch, and their shells came over like waves. The similarity was extraordinary. There was the forceful shish of a wave before it breaks, then the burst and the spray of smoke and atoms. The line of the street gave them their watermark, and, above all, there is the same sound of relentlessness about shells and waves. And yet, when the smoke cleared, I realized that man is even more indomitable. The column was still marching up the street.

A battalion came up on our left for the attack. Our artillery shelled the enemy trenches very intermittently, and, as it seemed to us, without conviction. Then our men strode up the hill and disappeared over the crest.

There was a lance-corporal of mine, called Grimthorpe, who had been promoted in England and only just sent out to us. I noticed him standing by the gun, looking very nervous. He was a mere boy, a tall, thin, ugly fellow, who had been, in the words of his vicar, "an earnest and willing helper in our Church Lads' Brigade." A sensitive soul, this first battle of his was troubling him greatly.

"You'd better take Number One," I said to him, just before the attack started, and I gave him the range and an aiming mark.

He looked at me in terror. I suppose he felt that this was his final plunge into actual fighting.

"Are there any Germans there, sir?" he asked.

I explained it was our duty to prevent there being any in that place, or they might do a mischief to our attack.

He fumbled the loading motions, and jammed the breech.

“Number Three stoppage,” he said to me hurriedly, as though he were going through a course of mechanism. “Fault in feed, sir.”

“Give the crank handle a sharp glancing blow,” which he did to no avail. “Pull belt left front and strike again.”

He did this and the gun was loaded. Then among the titters of the men, he blushed furiously and worked his sights on to the target.

A few minutes later the battalion attacked, and I gave the order to fire. Grimthorpe hesitated a minute, then pressed the trigger. I was too busy correcting his bursts to notice the boy, and gazed only where a tiny dust storm was dancing along the crest. When at last I gave the “Cease fire,” I saw the fellow was smiling.

“How many have I hit, sir?” he asked.

Then the men laughed outright. “’E’s been studying the picture papers,” said the inevitable Piggott. But Lance-Corporal Grimthorpe smiled on. He had fired his first shot.

It was too dark to see what had happened to the attack and we never exactly knew. We learnt that they were the Welsh Guards in their first action, and that they had gone forward magnificently. But our certainty of success had disappeared, and we grew tired of discussing probabilities. I remember my relief, when I met a subaltern who knew certain decadent folk that I knew, and how we sat in a minute bit of trench and laughed at their foibles for nearly an hour, until an order came recalling me to Loos.

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We marched back light-heartedly. True, we had done little, but that did not weigh heavily with us. We were all unfeignedly glad to get away. The village had been badly shelled in our absence and the road was full of holes. Shells were still coming over, and I fancy we had a hotter time returning than going up, but we did not notice it. The men chattered happily and I felt like singing.

When we reached our cellar, we found it full of men, and that a mistake had been made. We were to return at once and remain on the outskirts of the village in reserve. I myself felt very angry, but the men laughed.

We reached our position at about ten o'clock, and very soon the moon rose. The edge of the village was full of troops, some waiting to go into action, others just come out. The road was full of wounded being carried down, camp cooks, and

little groups of men collecting under subalterns and sergeants.

Everyone spoke in loud undertones. One heard confusedly, "Make room; stretcher-bearers."

"Fall in, No. 6 Platoon."

"Where's the Welsh Guards' dressing station?"

"Hello, sergeant, seen my men?"

"Stretcher-bearers, quick."

"Where's A Company's cookers?"

"Only eight men left, sir."

"Stretcher-bearers. For God's sake, send stretcher-bearers."

It was this last insistently all the night, or else inquiries as to the whereabouts of each battalion's dressing stations. For these the ruined houses were used and outside each door was a queue of soldiers waiting with their burdens laid down between them.

To wile away the time, I found each

dressing station and felt like a policeman, directing this sorry traffic.

They brought a young subaltern down, and while I was telling his bearers where to go, a captain passed, and seeing the wounded boy, cried: "Hullo, Tony. Badly knocked?"

The subaltern opened his eyes and smiled.

"Got a bit of a whack. Did you see our show?"

"No," said the captain, "only just come up."

"It wasn't bad," said the boy. "Do you remember Jim D——, at Impey's? He did damned well before they hit him. Took his men along in line, and wheeled 'em like a lot of—like a lot of . . . damned fine . . ." then he fainted.

"Thought 'e'd do that," said a bearer. "E's got great chunks torn right out of 'im. And never made a sound."

The captain stood by me, 'watching them carry the boy down the road. When they disappeared, he turned and shook my hand, and walked away. It was an unusual thing to do, but at the time it seemed very natural—a tribute, somehow, to the boy.

It was a night that seems to me, and I think will always seem, extraordinarily magnificent. I felt again, what I had felt that afternoon, only now far more intensely, how indomitable a creature man is. All around lay the wreckage of men and of the homes of men. Bodies lay haphazardly in the gutter, one arm thrown out, maybe, across the pavement, or else they protruded from under fallen masonry. In the brilliant moonlight nothing was hid. Destruction was hideously stark. "You know," said someone to me that night, "it all seems to me so bloody indecent."

It was, there is no other word, "bloody

indecent." As a scene it was the foulest that the ingenuity of man could create. But upon that scene the actors seemed to me, beyond all words, majestic. These were ugly men, no doubt, and crude, unwashed, uncultured, filthy, bloodstained creatures. They cursed and jostled each other round the cookers, and grouched perpetually against the time when they should have to fall in and go on again, but was there a wounded man to help, a hungry man to feed or a tired man to relieve, they gave, without a thought, of all they had. It was, perhaps, because of their gaunt appearance and the grim surroundings, that their spirit shone out, in contrast, so indomitably. For besides the perpetual inquiries upon the road that I have written, there was a ceaseless chatter among the men. Shells every now and then burst among or above us, taking their toll, but the chatter continued,

naively personal, and, in its detachment, unexpectedly human.

A little party were sitting on a pile of masonry, drinking their tea. The dead lay all around, and among them some Highlanders.

“They Jocks are queer fellows,” said one, jerking his head towards the fallen. “D’ye remember that night in Auchey, Bob?”

Bob spat his dregs to show he remembered. “Aye, the night t’ Jock coomed in.”

“Yes,” said his friend. “’E came in to the estaminay and arsked Madam for beaucoup vin rouge? So for a lark we thought we’d fill ’im up, sort of to teach ’im. So ’e swiped fourteen tots, and then arsked Madam for beaucoup vin rouge again. So ’Erb went round and got Madam to put some rum into the vin. And ’e swiped that. And never turned a ’air. Not a —— ’air.”

“A wonder wha’s ’appened to un, now,” said Bob.

“And then as we was feeling a bit narked,” continued the story-teller, “we thought as ’ow we’d do ’im in proper. So we got every bit of odd liquor we could collect and put it into ’is mug and——”

“Fall in, B Company,” came a sharp order.

The men gulped down their tea, and strode off to the front line, taking the story with them.

It looked as if the enemy were growing active a little after midnight, so I crept out beyond the houses to watch. A few volleys came across the open as I lay low and peered between the long grasses. It was very cold and desolate. Suddenly I felt a hand on my shoulder and a voice said :

“You’re all right, sonny, I’ll take you in.”

A man had seen me lying there, and thinking me wounded, had crept out to rescue me. I explained what I was doing and, seeing his mistake, or that I was an officer, he apologized. I cut him short at that, for somehow his kindness among that desolation touched me more than anything else I can ever remember. His tone, too, was so extraordinarily gentle.

He went away, but after a little returned with a pannikin of tea and rum, and while I drank it, told me first how his mates had been cut up, then of his wife and children at home. His little girl, whom he'd never seen, was called Maud, which he thought a very pretty name, and her grandfather had taken a great fancy to her.

“Funny how old people,” he said, “seem to go daft on children.” And with this reflection he left me.

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It quieted down shortly afterwards, and, as the moon sank, I went back to get some sleep. One walked in and out of houses through breaches in the wall. In one I discovered a large room where a number of men were lying, huddled up in all manner of strange poses, as men do lie when utterly exhausted. I found a clear space, rolled up my coat for a pillow and lay down.

I was in that half-unconscious state that comes just before sleep, when I heard something tear through the roof of the house and burst just beyond. I sat up and blinked, then cursed myself for being the only one who had moved. I was settling down again when another shell hit the corner of the house and sent one or two bricks crashing into the room. Again I sat up. "Anyone hurt?" I asked, but no one answered.

"God, how they sleep," I said. Then

fancying I smelt gas, I shook myself alert, and sniffed again.

Then it struck me as strange, that no one in all that company moved or snored, not even those who lay cheek by jowl with me, so I lit a match . . . and snatching up my coat, stumbled out of the room, where they had lain their dead.

Tuesday, September 28th.

Morning broke in triumph. There was a chill vigorousness about the air, that compelled one's attention to something or other. As there was nothing else on which to bestow it, we noticed the sunshine, the way it swelled out over the hill, spread glory through the pale sky, caught up its reflection in a million dewdrops and made our whole world smile its admiration.

It was a wonderful morning, and then a little incident spoiled it all.

I had just got into the front line and was

looking round, when we saw some figures come creeping down the hill towards us.

When they were some fifty yards from our wire they jumped up and ran on. Suddenly the Germans saw them and opened fire. Not one was hit, but they stopped, and threw up their hands, and stood there, undecided as to what they should do. They were in English uniforms, that was all we could see, as they were silhouetted against the sun. After a moment or two, they turned to go back to the German lines.

Somebody shouted "Fire." A volley of shots rang out, and the men dropped.

"Probably Germans, dressed up," said a captain, "come over to see how many we're holding the trench with."

It seemed a probable solution, until we discovered that two men had not thrown up their hands, but had crawled on and reached our line.

They were our men, left behind from an attack that had failed, young men, new to action. They had been hiding from the Germans all night, and in the morning, finding that they were alone, had crept back. Their companions had seen our trench, and afraid we should fire, had jumped up to show themselves and run for it. The German fire had startled them into throwing up their hands. Then, realizing they had surrendered, had turned to go back, and so paid the penalty of nerves—and honour.

It was a grim little incident, ended in a few seconds, but the effect lasted for hours. It got about, by some trick of rumour, that this regiment had run away. The myth flared up and down the line. Men, chilled, hungry and tired out, listened to no arguments. A regiment had run. If anyone showed any signs of running they would shoot.

A party of men were told off from the front line to dig a small communication trench back towards the village. As soon as they were seen to clamber out, a murmur went down the line, and rifles were swung from the parapet towards them. The party was recalled for a while, until the men had had their breakfast. Their nerves were quieter after that.

We were an odd crew in that front line. As I pushed my guns out along the slope of the hill, I found every sort of unit : cavalry, guards, a few riflemen, territorials, Scotch, Irish, Welsh, English regiments, three here, half a dozen there, lost nearly all of them, or strayed, but holding on from instinct of duty. Each detachment had dug its own little bit of trench, for the most part only waist deep, as the soil was hard chalk, and being divided off by traverses, gave to the happy mind of Private Keppey the impression of exhibits.

“ ‘Ere we ’ave,” he announced, “ the ’Orse Guards. Known familiar like as the Blues, because of their complexions.” The trench was too small to let us pass, and we were crawling along in the open. “ Further on we find ’andsome specimens of the Scots Guards. Don’t go too near ’em, ’Erbert, they’re a ’orrid savage lot. Looks is misleading.” A Scot was evidently throwing lumps of chalk at Keppey, and a missile must have hit him, for he swore suddenly and thereafter was quieter.

We reached our position and dug in. The digging was spasmodic. Every one was thoroughly tired, although the men had had a few hours’ disturbed sleep during the night. My own trouble was that I could not lose consciousness.

Firstly, there were the German guns to distract me. At right angles to our “ young ” trench was the double crassier running back to the Tower Bridge, which

the Germans used to get the range. Time after time we saw the shells burst along the slag-heap, at first far down, then nearer and nearer. When they had got our range we could wait, and everyone said to himself, or aloud, "Now we're for it," and expect the enemy artillery to traverse along our line. And then, when we were all keyed up, the shelling would stop. Even then there was no feeling of relief, but only of postponement.

And when I was beyond caring, and, longing only for sleep, closed my eyes, the picture of "that fellow," at first vaguely, and then more clearly, began to obsess my mind. "That fellow" was an officer, a nice-looking man, who lay on his back a few yards from me, one arm raised from the elbow, as though he had died snapping his fingers, a careless, half-defiant smile on his lips.

I do not know why he in especial

worried me, for there were thousands like him lying all over the ground. We had had to haul them out of the way to dig our trench. But worry me he did. I was always looking, against my will, to see if the arm had dropped, or the smile had relaxed.

“Funny kind of battle this,” I heard Corporal Grimthorpe say. “Don’t seem to be my notion of fighting. Look at them poor blighters getting chawed up. When are we going to get a move on?”

“Dinna ye fash yersel’ for a move, laddie,” said a Scotsman. “A’ve moved here, and here A bide.”

“’Ello, Jockm’, ’oo did you come with?”

“A came wi’ ma battalyon twa days since, and here A bide—wi’ ma battalyon,” and he glanced down the littered hill. “We canna move till we’ve taken these bit hills.”

“Seems as ’ow there won’t be nothing left of that old ’ill to take before long,” said Blake.

Our guns were at work, and the wood that crested the slope above the La Bassée road shook and spluttered with explosions. There was an enemy trench that ran along in front of the wood, and as the guns travelled up and down, I could see dark objects tossed high above the smoke, and fall, toppling over and over, to the ground again. The men decided these were bodies.

“Gawd, but that’s something like,” they said.

I went down the hill to see G—— and find out what was happening. He was sitting in a half-dug communication trench, that ran back to Loos, serewing up his moustache, as he does in moments of great thought, and watching the bombardment. I asked him innumerable questions,

but he sat stolidly watching the shell-bursts. To my questions he made no answer, yet replied to them all in the best possible way.

“I’m going to dig,” he said, and turning his back, began to hack away at the chalk.

By the time I returned, the bombardment was reaching its zenith.

“’Ow they do take on,” said Keppey, as the scream and bursting of the shells merged into one tumult. “Seem quite nasty about it.”

Then suddenly—absolute quiet.

“Now for the attack,” said Keppey, who seemed to have taken upon himself the role of *compère*.

The attack they made that afternoon has gone down already into history. It failed, for there were gallant fighters on both sides, and none but very gallant men would have withstood that bombard-

ment. But I only saw the British side, and it was unlike all that I expected.

We saw advancing slowly from another wood, that ran up the hill towards the Germans, a long line of soldiers. Their pace was a slow jog-trot, and they had the air of wonderfully disciplined, but slightly bored men upon manœuvres. It was all very quiet, very perfect, very unreal. I could not help wondering whether they had troubled to drop their cigarettes, and if they would stop to light up, and why some men were falling. It was hard for us to believe there were any Germans facing them, until we saw men in grey uniforms scrambling out of the trench and running back.

The attackers hardly paused at the captured trench, but always at the same steady trot went on towards the wood. They lost few men, and soon the last of them had disappeared in the trees.

“Glorious vict’ry,” said the *compère*.

“That ain’t vict’ry,” said Corporal Grimthorpe. “Why, men go mad in a charge. Act same as devils. See blood. They go raving.”

“Dinna ye believe all ye read, laddie. A dinna ken onything about horsemen; they’re strange folk, but that’s a rale fine infantry charge. A very fine charge, and mony’s the one A’ve been in.”

“But I’ve seen picters,” began Grimthorpe, “and the blokes—— Gor, they’re coming back.”

“Run into machine-guns,” said Keppey, the *compère*.

From the wood they had entered a few minutes before, men were retiring, just as slowly, just as methodically—but only a handful. Then it was the Germans’ turn to sweep the open space between the woods, and our men, retiring, lost heavily, but still they did not quicken their pace.

“ I wish they'd run,” said I to a strange officer who had come my way.

“ Thank Heaven they don't,” said the other, “ or we'd all be getting the wind up. Those men are saving our morale. Dying to save it. That show this morning had a rotten effect. God, look there.”

Out of the wood far behind the others came two men. After a little, one fell, and the other went on. He turned twice to look at his pal, and went on, but the third time he stopped, then faced about and went back. We watched him pick up his friend, and with one arm about him, help the wounded man to hobble down the hill. The German fire was intense, but the two trudged slowly on.

“ They'll get hit—they'll get hit,” we all whispered. “ They must get hit ”; but the two still moved slowly towards their trench. Then the German big guns opened fire, sweeping the hill where none but

wounded lay, yet the two survived and crept at last into safety.

The wounded were not so lucky, and the shelling butchered them as they lay. One Highlander, his legs shattered, pulled himself to within twenty yards of shelter, and then a shell whipped him and the earth about him into a spray of fragments.

Suddenly the strange captain turned to me, although I had said nothing.

“Do you mean to say you think they’re dead?” he asked almost savagely. “I don’t. There’s something about those fellows that’ll live for ever. No, not glory. Damn glory. Something greater — themselves.”

And at that he went off, as though I were beneath contempt. Whether it was his conviction that influenced me or some other private feeling, I cannot tell, but I do not remember worrying about “that fellow” any more after this.

The day quickly turned to darkness, and with the changing light came mist, and then drizzle and then a pouring rain. We stood in our little trench, dumbly, like animals, waiting for something beyond our control to happen to us. Shells still hurtled over us and crashed into the village, but even so it seemed better to be there and dry. We were tired, hungry and miserable with wet. The trench slowly filled with water, so that there was no question of lying or sitting down.

In front of us dark shapes moved about hammering in stakes for wire entanglements, while others scavenged round feeling for life in the prostrate bodies, and bringing in men whose wounds were already rotting.

We took turns at sentry, two by two. I shared a waterproof sheet with Private Livesey, a plain, pasty-faced man, whose sole care in life, as far as I had known, was

the cultivation of an extravagant love-lock, which he plastered over his forehead. Hunched up under the sheet we watched for signs of the enemy.

“ They’ve fair fooled us this time, sir,” he remarked, “ ’aven’t they ? ”

I grunted.

“ Thought we was for it, this time, all right. Cavalry going through, and all that. Not that I like seeing ’orses killed. Doesn’t seem right, some’ow. Do it, sir ? ”

“ No,” I answered, which was not much of a reply, but an improvement on my previous grunt. Sociability under a ground-sheet is liable to be infectious.

“ Still it would ’ave finished this ’ere war sooner, if we’d given ’em a taste. Saturday, sir, riding up made me all over. Fancy, sir, going through with the regiment. Makes you think, don’t it ? In sight of everybody. That’s what beats

me, sir. The pore old infantry go into the trenches and stay there and never see each other, or anyone else. Must sort of forget they're a regiment, all poked away in trenches. Fighting in the old days must 'ave been much easier than this, sir. I don't know 'ow the infantry do it, whole months so long at a time, hidden away and being killed."

He was silent awhile, wondering, as we all do, at the "feet's" endurance. Starshells shot up into the sky, and lit the dark hill, down which ran rivulets that caught the momentary blaze and shone like streams of fire. The bodies grew sodden and draggled. And guns boomed dully through the rain. The picture took on a new meaning.

A crack, a boom and the quick glare of a rocket crystallized the illusion. It was all a tremendous thunderstorm, that drowned the noise of waves and only the

deep rumble of the sea could be heard as an undertone against the claps of thunder. And these men were drowned, washed up upon the shore. Then darkness fell; the rain, finding a hole in the sheet, trickled down my neck, and I was reasonable again.

We plugged the hole with wet chalk, and stood very still, so as not to divert any more streams down our bodies. The other men, wedged against the trench, were sleeping. Private Livesey continued the story of his thoughts.

“ It’s all this jolly-making what does it, sir, like what the papers talk about. But they make us carry on as though we were enjoying ourselves like on ’Ampstead ’Eath. You know every one thinks as ’ow ’e’s the only bloke wot feels things. All the others take ’im in. And ’c takes in the others. Fair ’oax all round. Good job, too. You know Keppey, sir? ’E’s scared

'alf the time for all 'is talk. I only found out 'cos next day I called 'im to mind of something 'e'd said when we was getting it hot in the salient. And 'e didn't know 'e'd ever said it. All 'e remembered was 'aving the wind up. Funny, sir, isn't it ? ”

To this I think I made no answer, although at the moment I felt a liking for Livesey I had never felt before. He is still, and always will be, concentrated chiefly on his love-lock, and on the inane remarks which seem to be as necessary adjuncts to that ornament as hair-grease. That night, however, he gave me enormous hope. It was quite possible, though I could scarcely believe it, that all my own fears and panics had passed unnoticed ; that perhaps even I had joked ; for my internal performances had sickened me considerably.

“ Thank God,” I said to myself, “ there's still a chance.”

And so we stood, knee-deep in water, peering into the darkness.

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Wednesday, September 29th.

It was just after midnight and we were hammering the men awake to take our place under the ground-sheet, when some figures came slithering up the hill, asking for us. They splashed into the trench, and said they were the relief.

The only trench stores we could hand over was the sheet, and we left it gladly, as being something less to carry. Then we climbed out of our watery shelter, and slipped and stumbled our way back to Loos.

The streets all the way were deserted. The road was full of shell-holes, which had now filled with water, so that, tired out, and with occasional H.E.'s still coming over to distract my attention as I led the

way, I seem to have spent most of that march falling gallantly into several feet of water and crawling out like a half-drowned rat.

From the last hole, near our cellar, I was rescued by a nimble, courteous old man, who explained to me that I had "tombé dans l'eau."

Despite the dark he recognized me. He was very glad to see me and thanked the bon Dieu that I was safe, because, he said, following me towards the cellar, of my parent's feelings and also because of a certain difficulty he was having with the authorities.

Had I parents, he asked, and to my nod, added that they would understand his feelings. He had, as I would perhaps remember, a mule and a mare and her foal. The authorities said he must leave Loos, "à cause de cette bataille" and here he shrugged his shoulders. The

authorities, military men, were doubtless right, and he, good ally, would help them as best he could, but—but, being occupied with the battle, they could not understand his feelings with regard to his beasts, although he had explained often, and they said that not only the cart, but the mule and the mare and her foal must remain behind. And their fate—— ?

Just then a staff officer came rushing in.

“Where’s that bl——” then he saw Monsieur Bartel. “Oh, come along. You’re keeping everyone.”

Monsieur Bartel bowed coldly, then standing stiff among the litter of the yard and the ruined houses, he folded his arms and said :

“Messieurs, vous connaissez mes termes.”

For sympathy the Brass Hat turned to me and so did Monsieur Bartel. But I fled. The situation was beyond me.

In the cellar I found my guard, playing cards with their prisoners.

A shell fell somewhere, as I entered, and a German looked up, his face glowing with the satisfaction of an intelligent schoolboy.

“Crump,” he said, holding up one finger by his ear.

And then a tired Cockney voice drawled in tones of deep disappointment : “Wrong agine, Fritz, it’s a whiz-bang. You’ll never learn.”

“Guar-r-r-d — — ’Shunnn.”

“Kits on. Fall in the prisoners outside. We’re clearing out,” I said.

As we marched back over the hill, across which Monsieur Bartel was wisely prevented from taking his mule and his mare and her foal, the men chattered to Fritz, and Fritz waxed eloquent and talked too.

There was one German with whom I

agreed. He said, lifting up his voice in the freedom of captivity :

“Tis is dam foolishness, tis war is. Especially when we have so much else to tink about. And for happiness, many, many little tings.”

But I agreed more with Private Livesey, who said : “Yer silly fathead, wotcher begin it for ?”

Love o' Woman

Love o' Woman

PRIVATE GAZELY stood on the kerb, a straw in his mouth, and with a small switch tapped the side of his leg, for all the world as if he were in his market town.

The occupation amused Private Gazely. In Yorkshire something always happened when he stood thus on the kerb. He met a friend, and they went off for a drink together, or he saw someone's new cattle or horses go past, or he heard the news. And in France he still felt that if he stood long enough he always found some change—besides drills and fatigues—from the boredom of billets.

He got the time of day from limber drivers, as they splashed through the mud, and occasional news from passing orderlies ;

and when the road was empty he closed his eyes and tapped his leg and imagined himself back in Yorkshire.

Fransoy, however, a row of sad houses, sitting precariously in the midst of a mud ocean, promised nothing. The road stretched from horizon to horizon and was always bare, even of trees by the side. Gazely shut his eyes and tapped and tapped, but the smell of the mud and the dreary air infected all his thoughts.

He was going away, back to the barn and the muddy straw, and the lice and the guttering candles, where his mates were, when a girl passed him, carrying a pail of water. She was strongly made and young, and the sight of her body straining with her load, her breasts taut against her rough blouse, and her lips parted, showing white teeth, roused many feelings in Private Gazely. She was not such a slut as were most village girls.

“ 'Ere,” he said, “ I'll portay that.”

The girl, still carrying the pail, glanced up at him. He was a big, pleasant-looking fellow, with an open freckled face and a open happy smile. He was smiling then, confident of friendship, without malice.

“ Mon Dieu,” thought the girl for the hundredth time. “ Comme ils sont des enfants, ces Anglais.” But she smiled, too, for there was something infectious about Private Gazely's *bonhomie*.

“ I'll portay that for you,” he said again.

“ Eh bien,” said the girl, “ prenez-le.”

Private Gazely, without vanity, often said that he found no difficulty in speaking French. The main part of his sentences was colloquial English, into which he threw French words much as a cook puts plums into a pudding.

“ I doan't like seeing a femme portay trop beaucoup. No bon, ma sherrie, no

bon. Homme à tranchée. Femme travail. No bon."

"C'est la guerre," said the girl.

"Guerre no bon," said Gazely. "An' yon Fritz is the lad who brought us to it."

"Ah Freetz," the girl blazed. "Le crapaud."

Private Gazely did not approve of hate, except in the comic papers, so he tried his best to change the subject.

"Fiancé à la guerre?" he challenged, laughingly.

"Il est mort," said the girl, then, lest there be any doubt, "Pour la patrie, bien entendu."

Gazely whistled. "Put ma foot in—up to the 'ocks," he muttered.

"Et mon père, aussi, et mon frère—tous."

"Pauvre sherrie," murmured Gazely, genuinely troubled, and he put his arm round the girl's shoulders and patted her

soothingly. "Pauvre sherrie. Oh, dam the guerre."

They turned into a little red brick house, that vainly resisted the great sea of mud. The outside walls were spattered above the windows, and even indoors mud had found its way about the floors and on the legs of tables and chairs. A thin, weary woman was sitting beside the stove, her hands folded over her stomach, and, as the two entered, she exclaimed :

"Mon Dieu, en voilà un autre qui porte de la boue."

Gazely felt he was bringing nothing but misery on the household. It was his business to make reparation. Besides, he liked the girl.

"Sorry, Madame," he said cheerfully, "but there's beaucoup boue in these parts. Ah'll tell ye. Ah'll lavay the floor for ye."

"A quoi bon ?" said Madame. Then

she explained there were two officers billeted on her, always, and they were always in or out. Besides, what could she do. It would always be like that, always mud.

“C'est la guerre,” said Gazely. “Boue, boue, boue all the time. Ah'm fair sick of it.”

He looked round the room. It was meagrely furnished. Three china ornaments on the mantelshelf, a picture of an angel guarding two children from a precipice, a lithograph of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a certificate of education, framed, a hanging brass lamp, four huge enlarged photographs of Madame, Monsieur, and his grand-parents, all in their Sunday best, a table and four chairs were all the furniture.

“Beaucoup triste,” said Gazely, looking round. Then he pulled out of his pay-book an embroidered post card, on which

a swallow, surrounded by forget-me-nots, was carrying a letter that bore the word "Souvenir." He propped it against a china figure on the mantelshelf.

"Pour vous," he said to Madame. Then stepped back to see the transformation. "Ha, ha," he exclaimed. "Très gai."

It was the pay-book, however, and the glimpse of the blue notes in it, that most encouraged the old woman. She pulled up a chair to the stove for him, and dusted it in ceremony of welcome rather than for cleanliness. The girl came back into the room and they sat and talked awhile, awaiting the time, which soon occurred, when the soldier should suggest a meal.

The room was bare and uncomfortable, but Gazely had a feeling of homeliness, especially when the girl, reaching over to put the eggs on the table, laid her hand on his shoulder. It was familiar and caress-

ing. He chatted to them both throughout the meal, but it was the girl who fascinated his eyes. And she, not a bit abashed, watched him with a like eagerness.

The meal ended, and the mother went out to wash the plates. Gazely, clumsy at love-making, sat down by the stove and, as the girl passed, pulled her on to his knee. She smacked his face, and he laughed.

“Ami?” he said.

She sat rigid for a moment, then, suddenly drawing his face to her warm breast, bent and kissed his head. “Ma sherrie,” murmured Private Gazely.

.

Sleet was driving into every corner of the trenches on a wind that numbed each bit of one's body. Even in the dug-out, round a charcoal fire, men lay miserably chilled; while outside Gazely and Piggott,

hunched up in their coats, peered into the darkness through eyes half-closed against the sleet, longing only for the tot of rum that would give them heart again.

A shell, whining in the wind, came over and burst just beyond them. Neither man ducked. They were beyond caring.

“What’s the use o’ thet,” said Gazely. “Gordomme, is’n ut enough wi’out smashing us to bla-azes. Uts a’ moock.”

But Piggott would never be sympathetic. “O, chuck it,” he said. “You’d better go back to Fransoy, Ern, that’s what you’d better do, and get your little bit of goods there to hold yer ’and. Dunno what’s come over yer.”

“Happen you weren’t ’aving the ’oomp five minutes since,” muttered Gazely.

“Well, I ’as my grouse and gets over it,” said Piggott. Then a whirl of sleet drove on to them, in their faces, down their necks, stopping all recriminations.

For a while they were silent, then at last Gazely said: "That lass to Fransoy you mentioned . . ."

"Well, what about 'er? Like the rest of 'em."

"People is lonesome folk," said Gazely, as if in explanation of the girl—or of himself.

An officer, dragging himself through the mud on his rounds, heard this remark, and, looking for the speaker, saw two figures standing huddled up on the fire-step, their backs towards him, peering out across a world of desolation . . . two homely creatures, in the dark and the cold, and the wet and the mud, seeing nothing, not even the desolate rain-swept field out of which their heads just appeared, nor yet the bodies, lying clumsily like sandbags there. . . . Piggott and Gazely, he knew them, two very homely creatures.

And he heard Gazely add :

“Folk must 'ave folk o' times to fuss them about.”

Just then another shell wailed over and burst. But this time the two men ducked.

“I don't say women don't make a difference,” admitted Piggott. “Can do with a bit of cuddling myself. My missus—but what's the use of talking 'ere?”

“That maid——” began Gazely. Then he, too, stopped. Suddenly he nudged Piggott and pointed. They pulled up their rifles on to the parapet, and despite numbed fingers managed to sight on a dark shape they fancied crawling in the mud. The shots cracked out together. They heard a yelp, and then silence.

“No more women for 'im,” said Piggott, “'ooever 'e is.”

When the regiment went back to billets again at Fransoy, Gazely cleaned himself up and went that very night to see Louise.

He opened the door, smiling. He had smiled like that all the way from the trenches. His mates had chaffed him freely, but that only intensified his expectation.

His smile at the door was the supreme expression of his feelings. Good fellowship was in it, for without *bonhomie* Gazely could not have smiled at all ; and delight, and desire, too, that was almost a hunger in the man. And, after opening the door, he still smiled on, though amazement fumbled in his brain.

The girl was sitting on another man's lap, a man who had not cleaned up. She had drawn his face to her breast, and bending over, was kissing his head.

She looked up and saw Gazely. Saw, too, his smile change with stupefaction.

She expected him to go away, and was annoyed, yet somehow flattered, when he stayed.

“ 'Ere,” said Gazely. “ 'Ere.”

The other man looked up. “ 'Ullo,” he said. “ What's your trouble ? ”

Gazely mumbled incoherently.

“ Vous êtes fou ? ” demanded Louise. Gazely stared at her. Then, not trusting himself to speak, turned and left the room.

The next day he was standing on the kerb, straw in mouth, tapping his leg with a switch, and wondering at the blankness that had fallen on everything, when Louise passed, carrying a bucket. He let her pass.

“ Domn women,” he said, spitting out the straw, and hitting his leg viciously with the little switch. “ They can't leave a chap be.”

He hated her for having held the other fellow just as she had held him, and,

hating her, longed again to be eluted even so. Other things were not so necessary to him. They just followed. It was the grasp of her, and the tenderness, the need of her as a woman, that tormented him.

He stood irresolute, trying to go away, yet stayed, pretending that he would just let her go by to flaunt her.

Soon she returned, and as she passed he noticed again her young body straining with the load.

“ 'Ere,” he said, “ I'll portay that.”

The girl glanced up. He was more like a child than ever, only now there was no smile, but a look of puzzled weariness on his face.

“ Eh bien,” she said, “ prenez-le.”

They walked in silence, but when they reached the door Gazely turned to her, and putting down the pail, caught her hand and said :

“ Pourquoi — le soldat — lui bon — moi no bon ? ”

The girl snatched her hand away.

“ Qu'est-ce-que vous me demandez ? ” she snapped. “ Vous — ah, vous hommes. Vous vous imaginez que nous ne sommes que vos joujoux — nous femmes. Vous n'êtes pas mon maître. Personne ne l'est. Personne ne s'occupe pas de moi. Personne — tant pis pour eux. Et comment est-ce-que ça vous regarde tout ce que je fais ? Fou — ça m'est bien égale — moi. Une femme est toujours seule, vous savez. ”

Private Gazely understood none of this, but nevertheless he caught her and drew her to him.

“ Happen we're both in the same boat, ma sherrie, ” he said, and kissed her, forgetting everything.



A Talisman for Courage

A Talisman for Courage

IN days to come there will probably appear in some well-favoured review a series of war reminiscences, written in the purest English and in a delightful style. This alone would ear-mark it for distinction; but its attitude towards the war and those who wage it will be its claim to greatness. And yet as I write I see its future author shovelling manure, while a sergeant shouts, "Come on, you cross-eyed scallywag. Get a move on," and Mr. Briggs bends to his unhallowed task and gets a move on.

But Mr. Briggs is not a cross-eyed scallywag. He is a diffident, anxious little man of quite forty years, and though he wears khaki and rides a troop-horse he is a don and always will be, despite all the sergeants

in the world. If ever man joined for a sublime motive it was he. If ever man tried hard to forget a past life of combination rooms, old port and the mellowing atmosphere of culture it was Mr. Briggs. And yet I quite sympathize with his sergeant, who shouts: "Good 'eavens, you Briggs, where 'ave yer been brought up?"

I first remember seeing him at stables, in those restless days when we were all training, conspiring, and longing for nothing else but to "go out there." Though each at the beginning had his own technique for grooming his horse, Mr. Briggs was exceptional even then. He had a way of putting in dabs of cleaning, and then standing back, like a painter, to admire the result. When his horse grew restive he always dropped his body-brush and went to cajole the animal with honeyed phrases. Grooming was a lengthy business with Mr. Briggs.

And then came the day when some hundreds of us were hurried out to the front of fronts, and Mr. Briggs, left behind, passed out of our memories.

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There is a certain portion of the line where the dead of last summer's fighting still lie in little mournful heaps between the trenches. Here mines go up as a matter of almost daily habit, burying some, exhuming others of our dead, and it was there, standing on the fire-step within sixty yards of the Germans, that I next met Mr. Briggs.

He saw me first and wished me "Good evening." It was the courteous salutation of a don to a friendly undergraduate.

"Hullo, Briggs," I said, "I didn't know you were out. Pretty rotten place this, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir," he answered, and his diffident little stammer came back to him,

“ I—er—well, sir, I can hardly say—er—I enjoy it.”

“ Oh,” I answered, “ but then no one does.”

“ No, sir ? ” He speaks more in gasps than with a real stammer. I think it comes from his desire always to use the apt word. “ But some er—convey the impression of—er enjoyment.”

“ Pose,” said I. “ We all hate it—or bluff, if you like it better.”

“ The—er—subaltern spirit, perhaps ? ” he suggested.

“ Well, it serves its purpose,” I replied.

“ Quite, quite, sir, quite,” he agreed hurriedly. “ I didn’t know, and—er, you see, I never have understood young fellows. Then this heartiness—this Harry Tate-iness, if I may call it so, the inevitable ‘ How’s your Father ’ joke is merely—er——”

“ Swank ! ” I said.

“ Shall we call it a *modus vivendi*, sir ? ” he said. “ It’s wonderful how man does go on living and searching for talismans to inspirit him for further life—in this.” He glanced over the parapet, and said, perhaps to the bodies there, “ Of course, we must live—to carry on. Some of us, anyhow.” He turned again to me and, with his hand, patted a lump that stuck out from the side of the trench. “ Perhaps, sir, you think me—morbid.”

“ No,” I answered. “ I never analyse anything now.”

“ No, sir ? ” He patted the lump again, then looked down and saw it was the foot of some man protruding from his grave. “ Perhaps—perhaps, another poor Yorick. Who knows ? But I shall not play Hamlet, sir. I lost a friend to-day, sir. He understood . . . and his death breaks down much of my religion, sir, whatever people may say—trite religion, I mean. I must

evolve something personal. In the meantime——” he shrugged his shoulders.

“Then what is your *modus vivendi*, Briggs?” I asked.

“My form of swank, sir, is less exuberant. Horace. Did you ever read him?”

“I suffered more canings from Horace than from any other man,” I replied.

“No, sir, please. To me Horace is a wizard. I sit in the rain, and I read about sunny days in his Sabine valley, and somehow I feel the sunshine and the white marble and the *nitidæ puellæ*, white against the dark cypress. Of course, sir, this is nonsense to you. But, then, the conversation of some officers is unintelligible to a layman. You will forgive me, sir, I mean, we all have our methods. A shell bursts near you, and you say, ‘It is a bomb, pa-pah.’ The same thing happens to me and I say, ‘Integer vitæ

scelerisque purus . . .’ We both lull our anxieties by a trick of humour.”

I laughed and said, “And does Horace turn your tea into Cæcuban wine for you?”

“No, sir,” he replied; “trench tea is proof against all alchemy, even Horace’s. But over this place of—of desolation he casts a—a mirage. And the mirage, I feel, is the reality, and this is mere phase. Sometimes when they are shelling us, sir, I think of all the delicious places and debonair people of his odes. They seem so real, sir, so living, and I feel almost young and forget this. Youth, sir, is so invincible. Sir Philip Sidney, sir, is eternal, and Horace brings me to the due youthfulness, so that I become almost a soldier. He almost persuades me to ignore death. I become pagan, I fear, sir.”

A star-shell swooped up, illuminating all that tragic region, and Mr. Briggs

ducked his head. The haggard little fellow, the lines and angles of his face exaggerated by the quick light, looked a strange disciple of the doctrine he expounded.

“I’m afraid, sir, you think me ridiculous,” said Mr. Briggs. “My method of—manufacturing courage must seem fantastic to you.”

“Don’t be an ass, Briggs,” I said. “We all have our methods. I must go. Good night.”

As I rounded the traverse I looked back, and a star-shell showed me a little crumpled face gazing out over No-Man’s-Land. He was smiling already, seeing not the dead, but the laughing boys and girls of a bygone age. A Mæcenæ, perhaps, was talking rank pedantry to him over their goblets of Chian. Below, in a flood of lapis-lazuli, twinkled the Bay of Baia, and the smell of roses came to them on a

lazy wind. Maybe some sweet-smiling, sweetly speaking Lalage was waiting for the littérateurs to attend to her. . . .

Yet it was lucky for Mr. Briggs that the Hun over the way was also dreaming. Perhaps he, too, read Horace.

In Skyline Trench



In Skyline Trench

“IF you show so much as the rim of a thought they’ll blow you to hell at once,” said a complacent fellow. “They’re queer ones to see,” he added, thoughtfully regarding a piece of bully before he swallowed it. “There was a lad fell to cursing the Germans, and he made the air so thick with curses that they saw it.”

“Did they hit him?”

“They did not. Do you see those feet there? That’s the man they mistook for him.” The complacent fellow laughed. “Oh, I have no respect for the Germans at all. If I had a little machine-gun here I would kill them by the hundreds and thousands. I would be a great slayer here,” and he laughed again.

The two officers who had crawled into his shell-hole peered cautiously over the top. The ground sloped down towards the German lines, then up again to Thiépval, and the hill behind, where the enemy guns were. For the moment there was a lull in the firing and they could see over all the wasted land. It was like a piece of putrid brown cloth held together by white seams, that ran in every direction, untidily, and, it seemed, without care. In some places there were big patches of dirty white, where the shells had concentrated and laid bare the chalk sub-soil. But for the most part the ground was pitted with innumerable small holes, so innumerable, that they, more than all else, gave to the earth its appearance of coarse texture, loosely woven, whereof the deep trenches were the seams.

In all the panorama there was no sign of life. The ground bore no likeness to

any living earth. It was horrible and rotten, bearing nothing, not even a blade of grass, nor any colourful thing to break the monotony of the dead place. And upon it no living thing could be seen to move.

“Must be four or five thousand Boches there somewhere,” said one of the officers. “Where’s your map? Let’s have a look.”

For a few minutes they tried to recognize various positions, but suddenly the lull passed and the guns on both sides roared out.

“They’re like the dogs in the village who take to barking all at once,” observed the soldier. “They’ll be ‘strafing’ us in a minute’s time. They are terrible chaps to fire their guns.”

There was no question of seeing anything now. On both sides the guns were thundering away. Overhead the shells

wailed, screamed and groaned. The sky had suddenly become alive with all manner of savage noise that burst here and there and thrashed the earth into a storm of dust and fragments. Then out of all the clamour came the sound that one learns to recognize so soon.

They threw themselves flat against the side of the hole, just as a shell burst a few yards in front of them.

“Wasn’t I saying . . . ?” began the soldier, lifting his head, only to shudder into the earth again, as another shell gave its quick warning of approach.

“They’ve spotted us,” said an officer, then crouched quickly.

“Sure this is only their habit,” said the soldier.

For ten minutes they lay there, pressed hard against the soil while shells burst all about them, casting up great spouts of earth and stones and smoke.

“Better get a move on,” said one at last, but the other, a mere boy, did not move. He was white and shaking, and was staring dully at the head of a man that had been blown against him.

“Come on, old son,” said his companion, “or we’ll be late for tea.”

The boy started, looked at his friend and then at the hurricane of war around him. The older man smiled. “They get so bored if we’re late,” he said.

“All right,” said the boy.

They scrambled out of their shelter and ran a short distance dodging from hole to hole, while fragments of shell whipped past them with sharp thuds into the ground, and at last found a piece of trench. It was full of men, mostly wounded, who had lain there for days. Some had died, and these they threw out to give more room for the living.

“Been here five days,” said a scare-

crow of a man. His face was black with hair, dirt and dry blood, and his clothes were filthy and ragged. It was hard to see he was an officer. "Getting rather tired of it. Lost nearly all my men. Good fellows, too. And I'm damned sorry, but I haven't a drink to offer you. Everything's gone west. What's the news?"

They talked for a while, discussing the situation. "Yes, it's real good," said the scarecrow. "We're putting it across the Hun now all right. But I shouldn't mind letting my fellows have a bit of a rest. They've had a bad time. What are you doing here?"

"Staff," said the older man, "reconnoitring positions. We must push on. Good luck."

"Good luck," said the scarecrow, "and think of me when you climb into bed tonight. Good-bye."

They clambered over holes and mounds,

pausing every now and then for the wind to blow away the smoke and dust, and show them their whereabouts. They found a wounded man half buried in the ground. After much labour they dug him out and carried him into the nearest bit of trench. He had lain there for a day, he told them, and twice when his comrades had found him, they had been killed before they could get him out. It was terrible, he said, waiting for death when the shells came, unable to move. Fragments of shell were always hitting his helmet.

The trench was being badly bombarded when they reached it, climbing over the dead soldiers to find shelter. They took him into an old German dug-out, where they found an officer lying. He was mad, and raved about his home in Australia. There was a soldier looking after him, soothing him as though he were a baby,

and who resented the new-comers, glaring defiantly at them. Suddenly his master began to whine.

“It’s murder,” he cried, “sheer murder. They’re killing us like rabbits.”

The two officers had made the wounded man comfortable and were leaving the dug-out, when the servant barred their way.

“That officer there,” he cried, “is the finest man in the whole damned army. Brave as a lion. Better than the whole lot of you put together.”

“We know,” said the older officer. “Look after him and he’ll be as good again.”

“He’s the finest officer in the world,” said the servant, but less defiantly. “A shell came and buried him and now he’s wandering a bit. Don’t heed what he’s saying.”

“Well, get him away to-night,” said the

officer, "and lend a hand to this fellow we brought in. Things will quieten down soon. Don't worry."

They continued their way down the trench, running from hole to hole, laughing with the scattered troops they met, helping wounded into better shelter, and in quiet moments taking stock of the position. The dead lay in tumbled heaps on every side, some dead but yesterday, others stinking and rotten, and black with flies, that buzzed up in a noisy swarm as the officers approached, disclosing the half-consumed features of some poor man or boy.

Gradually the trench became better, the shelling less. They reached a communication trench and found it blocked with wounded, who had dragged themselves so far and could get no further. Several times they found stretcher-bearers dead together with the man they had

tried to save. The few who were left were bandaging the worst cases, using every dug-out as a dressing station. Some of the men were moaning, but most were either lying deathly still, or were already laughing about the time they would have when they got back to England.

“Whew,” said the younger officer at last. “I believe we’re out of it. You know, I feel rather a rotter coming away like this.”

“I think that’s enough for one day, my son,” said the other. “God, but the world’s a good place to come back to.”

Before them lay the valley of the Ancre, with its woods and broad fields and swelling hillsides. It was already evening, but the light had that luminous clearness that comes between storms. The ground still glittered with the recent rain, so that in that pearly radiance the earth seemed far less dark than the lower-

ing sky. And the wet soil smelt clean and sweet and very comforting. For a moment the sun shone out behind the great clouds, and all the quiet land became brilliant in the evening light.

Instinctively they turned to the hill they had just left. They could see nothing of it. A great cloud of smoke and débris was drifting across the land, hiding its desolation and the weary men who lived and died there.

The Return of the Warrior



The Return of the Warrior

JACQUES VIROT'S home-coming was simple, but it satisfied him. He opened the door and entered in a stream of sunlight.

“Me voilà,” he said.

“Me voilà,” said his mother, her face all puckered up with the effort of accepting a new situation. Her mind worked slowly, but the man in the sky-blue uniform smiled and said “Maman.”

“Maman,” repeated Madame Virot ; then she gasped, swam out of her chair, and went towards the new-comer. “Jacquot, mon petit Jacquot, t’es bien ?”

“Bien, et toi ?”

“Oh ! le bon Dieu !” said Madame Virot, clutching her boy's arm.

He bore it for a little, then released his arm.

“Blessé,” he said. “Blessé,” repeated his mother. In a moment her large face was puckered again, her mind slowly grasping his meaning, and her blue eyes full of anxiety. “Toi, t’es blessé?”

“Oui, mais ce n’est rien. Pas la mort.”

“Pas la mort,” agreed his mother. . . .

When I returned his father had come in, and with a neighbour they were discussing crops and village chatter. The son had already changed his uniform for corduroys and, except for the way his mother’s eyes followed every movement that he made, there was nothing to suggest that he had ever been away.

They agreed that in the mornings Jacques should drive the farm cart with milk for the English hospital. That was all his arm allowed him to do. In the afternoons he should help cut the clover.

“ Et la guerre ? ” asked the neighbour.

“ Ça marche, mais tout doucement,” answered the boy.

“ Tout doucement,” whispered Madame Virot.

I was not the only one surprised at the quietness of Jacques Virot's return. Private Durkins expressed himself “ knocked bukri.”

“ 'E's 'ome from Verdun, 'e is. One of them blokes what put little Willie in the barrer, and they treat him as if 'e'd been 'aving a Saterdag binge. Don't seem natural. Never thought Fronsays was like that. Did you ? ” His companion expressed picturesque wonder.

“ Feel sorry for the feller,” said Durkins, “ 'is 'ome must seem strange with all of us about.” There was a pause, then, “ Let's cheer the bloke up.”

They invaded the kitchen with gusto.

“ 'Ello,” said Durkins to the boy,

“ Nous camarades. Content vous voir. Santé.”

“ Santé,” whispered Madame Virot, then she rose slowly and fetched two more glasses.

The boy held out his hand to the two new-comers and smiled. He saw there was no need for him to talk. Private Durkins was quite at his ease and full of conversation. They drank each other's health several times in feeble cider and exchanged opinions of the war. Jacques was reserved. He spoke of it as a great cruelty to be endured, gladly, for France. He had none of Durkins' air of careless adventure. Only when he spoke of the Germans did he show any emotion.

“ Ceux sont des crapauds, ces sales Boches,” he said.

“ Dirty 'Uns,” agreed Private Durkins.

It was the only time I have heard a

British soldier use the word "Hun," but Durkins evidently realized that the melodramatic was expected of him.

What were the succeeding stages of the intimacy I do not know. I only know that Private Durkins was constantly to be found in the kitchen of my billet, while Jacquot, or Jacko, as his new friends called him, seemed to be elected an honorary member of the local canteen. The conversation was rather limited, but that was no obstacle to Durkins' firm resolve to fraternise. They went for long walks together, or sat by the side of the little stream, exchanging few remarks but many cigarettes. In the distance the battle of the Somme thundered through the long summer days.

One evening Private Durkins grew sentimental.

"I like trees and things," he said. They were sitting at the edge of the camp;

watching all the little tricks of light and colour that the sunlight played with the river and with the wood that fringed its banks. Above them, very high and tiny, a fleet of aeroplanes came droning homewards through the cloudless sky. Durkins watched them for a little, then, smoking stolidly, turned to the big hills that were glowing red in the evening light.

“Remind me of my ’ills at ’ome,” he said. “Chilterns we call them.”

“Vous dites ?” asked Jacques.

“Ah,” said Durkins, “je dis que j’aime —” he knew no more, and spread his hand out towards the countryside.

“La France ?” asked Jacko.

“Oui, la France,” said Durkins hastily.

Their friendship blossomed apace from this date.

But most interesting was it to note that the Englishman did what little talking

there was. Durkins was the gay, whimsical spirit, while the Frenchman remained cold, enigmatic, and very silent.

The end came suddenly. I entered my billet one night to find "all a history," as Madame Virot said. But Jacquot had lost his usual phlegm. "Fair spitting out words like a blooming machine-gun, aren't you?" said Durkins calmly. Their speeches were lost on each other, but their purport was obvious. A certain Céline Didelet had come between them, or, rather, I suspect, that Durkins, irresponsible English Durkins, had come between the faithful French lovers.

It was a tragic scene, but I felt most sorry for Madame Virot, who was staring at the pair, repeating odd words from her Jacquot's tirades, utterly miserable and bewildered by the volte-face. When she saw me she looked still more aghast, then she smiled, and spreading out her fat

hands in explanation, said, "Monsieur l'officier. . . ."

"We're for the trenches to-morrow, Durkins," I said.

"Yes, sir," said Durkins imperturbably ; but the others caught the word. Madame Virot threw up her hands, and gasped. "Tranchées," was all she said. The animosity left Jacquot's face. He stared at Durkins, and in his gaze there was no anger, only recognition. Quickly he sprang forward and clasped his rival's hand ; but, he, too, could find little to say. And then I noticed, whom I had not seen before, Céline, a buxom girl of about twenty, with sallow cheeks and dun hair drawn tightly back.

She, too, came forward intently ; and I regretted my dénouement.

For a moment she stood with her hands to her throat, murmuring, "Tranchées, tranchées," and staring at me, as though

I had caused this new complication. I felt her impeachment and wished myself away. It was a tense moment for us all, and even Durkins had the grace to look abashed. Céline was dominating the stage and we had to wait her time. Then suddenly she cried, "Oh, cette triste guerre," and threw herself into the arms of—Jacquot.

"Quand même, Durkin, les femmes passent. C'est la France qui doit vivre à toujours." It was the only speech that Madame Virot ever made, but it was a good one.

And Durkins answered, "Vive la France!"

The Pigeon

The Pigeon

“**L**IKE catching a blurry bus,” said some one.

Which was true, except that they did not catch up with that barrage, but saw it, a mass of smoke and debris over the German trench to the left, some two hundred yards away, then watched it swoop up the hillside like a cloud-burst.

The dispositions for the attack had come through, before Head-quarters had realized the position. The Germans had bombarded them for days, and now the regiment was scarcely a hundred men, holding nearly a thousand yards of trench. Where the other nine hundred were no man knew for certain. But there were bits of bodies lying all over that ground, whole stretches of trench had disappeared,

some men with them, while others, sent on errands of a hundred yards or so, lost their way completely in the wrack of battle.

They assembled in the second line, received orders and were moving up, when they found that the bombardment had destroyed the communication trenches. If they had gone across the open, not a man would have reached the front line. On the right was a trench that still gave a little shelter, so they tried to move up that, and it was then they heard the barrage that should have covered their attack, scream over and burst upon the German lines.

They ran, crouching, up the trench and tried to follow the barrage, but it was useless. Some men, by mistake, did go over, too far to the right, and disappeared. The Germans were shelling pretty heavily, and no one knew what to do. The whole

world to them was just noise and fragments : one could see nothing, hear nothing, feel nothing. It was beyond the scope of man's emotions.

Suddenly one of the men who had followed the barrage came back, threw himself into the trench and gasped, " Germans."

An officer asked him what was the matter, and after a little he became coherent.

" Masses of them, sir. We went over and saw their bayonets. Scores of them, packed tight. There to the right. Three deep in the trench."

The officer went forward to reconnoitre, and came back with the same story.

The three officers who were left held a short consultation, but the situation was plain.

" They're going to attack all right. It looks as if they'll sweep us off the map

and take back all we've captured. Any machine-guns left ? ”

“ No, sir,” said the M.G. officer, “ they're all buried.”

“ Can we phone back ? Any wires left ? ”

“ No, sir.”

“ Then we're for it.”

There was a pause for a minute. Three shells burst almost on the trench and sent them all reeling to the ground. They lay there and looked at each other, then one, a boy, laughed.

“ Isn't it annoying, pa-pah.”

They all laughed. Then the captain said :

“ Look here, one of you take a runner and try and get back to the C.O. Tell him what's up, and try and phone through to the guns.”

“ I'll go,” said one, and picking a runner, he went.

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The story is best told in his own words.

Run, I've never run so hard in my life. I didn't think I'd get through, as they were barraging every bit of the ground. Like going into the sea in a storm. But it put the wind up me all right and I ran like a hare. Funny, how things strike you. I couldn't help thinking of a picture I'd seen as a kid, supposed to represent a school of whales spouting up water and bits of boats and men. All those shells bursting about reminded me, I suppose. I never realized how much I wanted to run away, till I got the chance and was properly started. The shells sent me spinning about half a dozen times, but that only made me run the faster. And then I got a most unholy whack and came to with my tin hat biffed in, and the poor runner fellow all splayed out beside me. I grabbed his helmet and pushed on. There was a quarry place, where I got absolutely lost. You couldn't see more

than about fifty yards at a time for dust and smoke, and I ran round and round like a mouse in a wheel, trying to find my bearings and get out.

Absolutely lost, and as lonely as a man in the moon. God, I was scared. If I hadn't got the running idea so fixed in my head, I'd just have chucked myself down and waited for a shell to pick me off. The whole world seemed just a mass of bangs, and then suddenly the wind blew an alley in the smoke, and I saw right down across the valley, and damme, it was a sunny day, and I could see the corn-fields on the far hill, and people getting in the harvest. It made me mad to see 'em so unconcerned. However, it gave me my bearings, and I bolted again.

And then suddenly I found myself scooting down a hole, like a rabbit, and the C.O. saying :

“Hullo, Johnny, have a drink.”

I had a drink, a stiff 'un, and then I sort of woke up. I must have been most damnably rattled, for he began soothing me.

“Now,” he said, “just pour yourself another, and take a fag, and sit down and tell me all about it.”

I told him that, thank God, we'd been too late to attack, and now the Huns were on our left, waiting for their bombardment to stop, when they'd attack us, that we were only a hundred left, and all the machine-guns were either smashed in the open, or buried in the dug-outs. You know, I was sick with myself for being so windy, but I somehow wanted to make the C.O. look a bit upset.

Instead he just turned and said to an orderly :

“Have you got those wires mended yet?”

The orderly said, “No, sir.” It was Jenkins. You know the way he talks,

very butlerish. "No, sir, they've all had a try, sir, but they've all been hit, sir, fatally, for the most part."

He made me laugh, although I must say his news was pretty rotten.

"Runners all dead, too, I suppose?" said the C.O.

"All dead, sir." He was like a chap making an inventory.

"Well, Johnny," said the C.O., "we'd better get our guns, and fire our six shots. Who's up in the line?"

"Brown, Scatters and the Child."

"The Child still imitating Harry Tate, I bet. When the Boche puts a revolver to his chest, he'll look idiotic, and ask if the muzzle velocity is coincident with the bursting charge, pa-pah. And, I suppose Scatters is having brilliant inspirations about thwarting the Teuton, inventing hard. And Brown is sitting there, smoking his foul old pipe. Oh, the good fellows!"

To hear the C.O. talk like that made me choke. Sort of epitaph business.

And then, just as we'd got our revolvers ready, old Jenkins came up.

"Beg pardon, sir, but I've found this here," and he lifted a cage at arm's length, as though he were a butler again, removing an indelicate puppy. In the cage was a pigeon.

The C.O. asked where that came from, but no one knew.

"We'll try it," he said.

He wrote to the C.F.A. and said :

"Artillery fire futile. Hun bombarding heavily, preparation to attack. Massed in Turk's trench. S.O.S." We tied the message round the pigeon's neck and sent it off.

You couldn't see the sky or anything for shell-bursts. It was about all we could do to stand against the percussion. The poor old pigeon fluttered up like a straw in

a whirlwind. The C.O. watched it disappear in the smoke.

“ You know,” he said, “ I feel remarkably like Noah.”

And then we waited. A shell pitched at the mouth of the dug-out and blew it in. A couple of men worked digging the earth away, while we watched and yarned. I often wonder what we talked about, sitting there, buried under the ground, with the earth being sent to glory all above us, and every chance of being either suffocated or bombed to bits, when the Hun got us. I know we laughed a lot, and I fancy our yarns were merely indecent. At least, I know they were, for the C.O. said: “ It’s a funny way to go out, telling these yarns. All the same, it’s the only way—laughing.”

We weren’t buried for long, only it seemed an age with the shells going smash, thump, crash on the ground above us.

Just as we got the entrance clear, we heard the shelling stop. That silence is just hell. It knocks you to bits. I remember once, after we'd strafed the Boches pretty badly, and our guns stopped, they came over and surrendered, because they couldn't stand the quiet and were afraid the bombardment would begin again. I know I felt like that then.

We scrambled out and looked round. The wind blew the dust away, and you could see the ground all smashed to blazes—just like a plate of porridge. Not a sign of anyone. And I knew that any moment the Boches would come stumbling out of their trench and do us in. I felt damnable. I remember wondering why the devil I was there, and why on earth a lot of utter strangers would come running across the beastly broken ground and bayonet me. It seemed so stupid. All the same, it never occurred to me, that

I might surrender. I suppose it was because we'd fought for that ground, and there were bits of my men lying all over it. And then I had a wild desire to get to those few men there in front and go west with them.

The Colonel had his glasses out and was looking through them. Suddenly he cried : "There they come," and I looked and saw a lot of bayonets jabbing about in the air. Masses of bayonets and men, tumbling unevenly over the ground.

I got my revolver ready and felt furiously angry.

The C.O. was as calm as ever. He just called down to the few men in the dug-out and told 'em to come up. We could hear our men in the front line firing. Just a few stupid little shots they seemed after the shelling.

"Now we're for it," said the C.O.

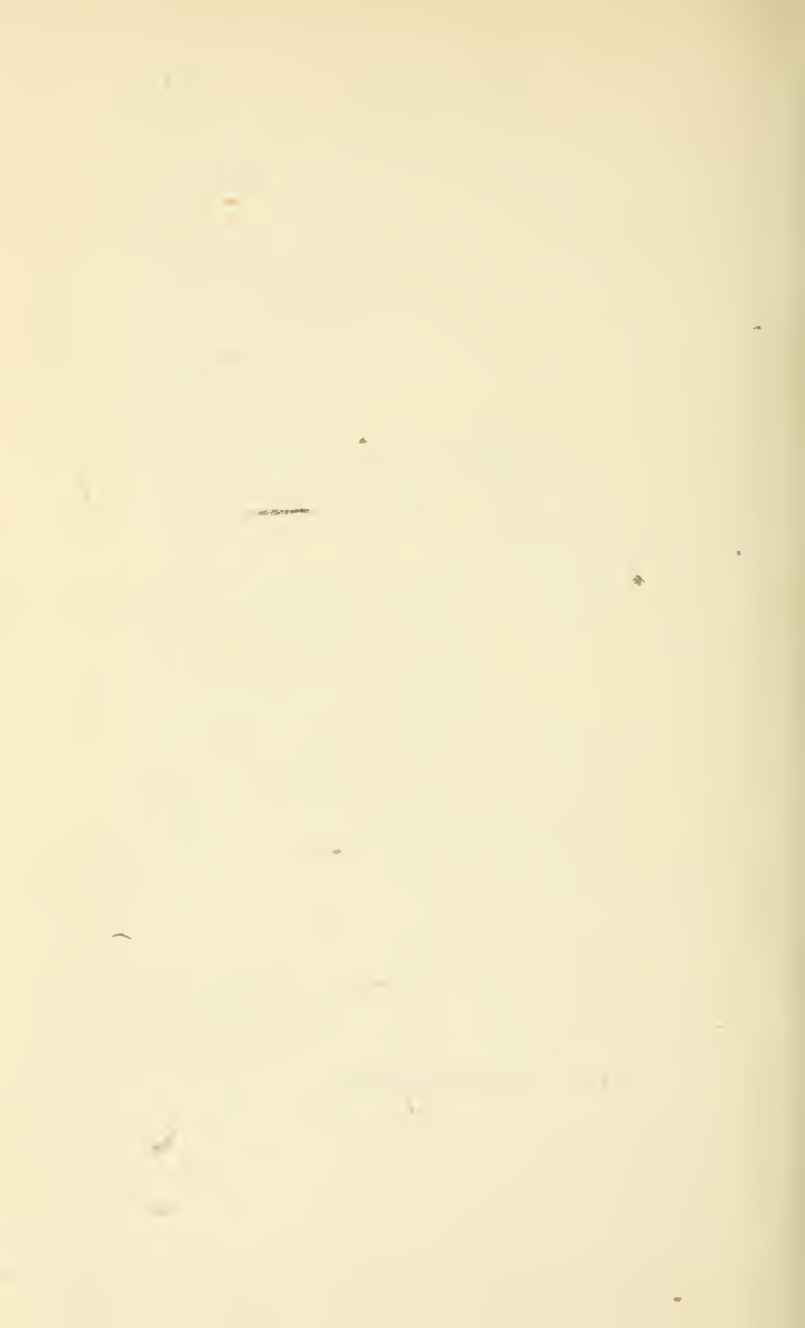
And then the miracle happened. It was

all over in a flash. There was the most unearthly crash belched out in a huge circle behind us. The whole sky screamed and whistled. You can't describe it. The sky just screamed—Ee-ee-ee—like a fellow gone mad, getting his own back. And then the ground in front of our fellows burst like a volcano. We didn't see any more. That was the end.

The C.O. got hit the next day, and I went to see him in hospital, when I was on leave.

His wife was looking out of the window and suddenly she said: "What a dirty bird." We looked, and saw a London pigeon, pecking at crumbs on the window-sill.

"And that remark of yours," said the C.O., "would be sufficient cause for a divorce, my dear," and he gave me a bun to render as thanks-offering.



The Widow's Bonnet

The Widow's Bonnet

“MY world-famous turn,” announced Private Piggott, “entitled ‘Celebrities at the Front.’ ’Ere we ’ave Private Piggott visiting a Ruined Farm. The Farm is marked with a cross.”

The men were tired, and this did not amuse them very much. Some even said : “ Oh, dry up, Snowdrop. Chuck it.”

Private Piggott, alias Snowdrop, looked regretfully at his mates. He was just as tired as they, but he had an absurd idea under his thatch of coal-black hair, that it was his duty to keep up the British Army’s reputation for humour. He worked, as he said, with Ginger Blake, and they called themselves the ’Eavenly Twins : Comedy duo. They felt, I be-

lieve, that they had a call, and that it was as much their duty to amuse as it was the Padre's to preach.

Piggott looked for Blake to help him through the crisis, but Ginger was attending to his foot, swearing continuously. We gathered that a nail had worked through and had caused bleeding. Blake was almost monotonous on this point. Piggott realized that his mate in such a mood was of no use for conscious humour. So he shrugged his shoulders and turned to the farm.

There was almost nothing of it left, except one corner where two fragments of wall joined. In this corner was a recess, that before had been a cupboard, for its door still dangled on one hinge, and there, hanging forlornly by its strings, was a black widow's bonnet. Somehow it looked very like a ruined shrine, with the central figure alone untouched.

Snowdrop was quick to seize upon the allegory.

“Comrides,” he said. “Being engaged in the ’oly task of upholding respectability and upsetting pore old Fritz, and being totally unprovided with any flag or banner like as they used to ’ave (for fear we should go and lose it), I ’ave took upon myself to present you, my ’oly comrides, with an emblem of that sacred respectability for which we shed our blood.”

Here he produced the bonnet and among loud laughter was going to put it on, when the sight of his mate’s brilliant hair appealed to him. He clapped it on to Ginger’s head.

“Purged by fi-er,” he said, “this banner must never file to ennoble us. My young friend, Private Blake, shall have the honour of bearing it.”

Thus by right—to them the sacred

right—of the incongruous, the bonnet belonged to Ginger. Besides being a humorist, this latter was also a sniper to be feared, and, henceforth, whether he crawled out o' nights among the bodies of No-Man's-Land, or climbed to a convenient branch in Hooge Wood, you could always see the tremulous sprays of black jet dancing above his blazing poll.

They were an incongruous pair, yet they had something—some nucleus of themselves in common. Blake was a big ruddy man from, I think, a Midland farm, a genial, easy-going fellow, at times roused to sudden furies, but as a rule intensely anxious to please.

Piggott, known in irony as Snowdrop, was a black-haired little Cockney, quick in thought and in action, very sensitive, and a past-master in the use of sarcasm.

His very cheerfulness was a triumph of the sarcastic.

Ginger's humour was poor. Until he wore the bonnet, the men suffered him only as a foil for Snowdrop. The bonnet, however, stamped him as a comedian. For variety once he purloined a Glengarry, but the absurdity of being a Scotsman soon palled and he reverted to his widowed state.

When the order came that all ranks must wear steel helmets, the comedy duo was very nearly dissolved. Piggott with good grace accepted the strange decree of the higher authorities and one day came strolling uncasily down the trench clad in complete armour, made from biscuit tins. Unfortunately, the first person he addressed was Ginger.

“By my halidom,” he said, “where is thy helmet, steel, one, mark one? Dost think, knive, to do battle in thy nightcap?”

Ginger blazed into words unprintable. “If you think,” he ended, “I came out

'ere to make a bluddy fool of myself, you're mistook."

"What about yer usual behaviour?" said a melancholy corporal. "Gawd knows, I don't see no use in giving myself a stiff neck and making myself look like a trussed chicken, sticking wrong ways out of a pie-dish, no matter what the officers say. If yer gets 'it, yer gets 'it, and a bit of tin won't make any odds. But I don't see you've got any call to fret yerself about making a fool of yerself, Ginger."

The corporal meant well, but he wounded Blake in his tenderest spot. Even so, if the men had not laughed, Ginger might have vented his anger on the corporal only. But they laughed, and Piggott, waving to them to be silent, clashed his tin arms against his breastplate. Ginger turned at the noise, and saw his mate making gestures.

"You bluddy little son of a ——" Then

anger and wounded pride were too much for him, and, snatching the bonnet off his head, threw it far over the parapet and strode away.

For two days they saw it hanging on the barbed wire, whither the wind had carried it, but nobody mentioned either it, or the new feeling, of bitterness almost, that began in those days to be felt.

On the second night, as Ginger was standing on guard, he saw a figure moving near the wire. There were no listening posts there, as it was too close to the German trench, and for a moment he thought of firing. Then he wondered, and wondering, let the figure come close to the parapet.

“That you, Snowdrop?” he asked.

“Yus.”

“What the ’ell did you do it for? I don’t want the — bonnet.”

“Well, yer’ve gotter ’ave it now, Gin-

ger," and Piggott tossed it over to his mate. He was going to follow, when some shots came thudding into the sandbags. He threw himself down and lay still.

Again Ginger nearly destroyed his mate. This time by speaking, but luckily stopped in time. He did not know if Snowdrop was hit, or lying doggo, and the suspense hurt him. At last the German fire stopped, and he heard a scramble on the parapet. In a moment Piggott was back in the trench.

"Gawd, I thought they'd 'it you," said Blake.

Piggott said nothing, but examined his helmet.

"Thought so," he said, pointing to where it was dented.

Thereafter Blake always wore his bonnet above his helmet, the use of which latter he staunchly advocated, and Piggott never told him that that evening he had

narrowly escaped severe punishment for "damaging Government property" with a hammer.

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"And sausidges," said Private Piggott.

"We'll cook 'em proper when we get back to billets," said Ginger.

"Noaw, we won't, we'll 'ave 'em to-night? We mayn't never get back to billets, and I shouldn't like to think I 'adn't eaten them sausidges. What do you say, boys?"

The boys all agreed that the "eat and be merry" principle was correct. Then, as the mail was in, fell to reading their letters.

"Just like my missus to send us sausidges," said Piggott. "She never forgets, she don't. She knows I've got a fancy for 'em. Must 'ave seen me put down hundreds."

Ginger grunted. "Often think I

shouldn't have done so badly if I'd got married myself. There isn't nobody sends me things."

"What about what you got when we was back to Bouzincourt?"

"Oh, but there weren't no sausedges," said Ginger, wistfully.

"And, besides," said Piggott, "a wife's a toss up. May be bad or good. Mine's all right. She's sensible. Wants a bit of cuddling every now and then, like all women. Funny 'ow they like just little things you'd hardly think of. I gave my missus a bunch of flowers once. Struck me as funny at the time. Don't know why I did it, but I saw 'em and gave 'em to 'er, and it seemed to ehinge 'er all over. They're funny sort of——"

And then the whole world seemed to explode.

When Ginger Blake recovered his senses enough to look for his mate, he saw, lying

face down on the rim of a shell-hole, a little tousled figure, its legs so twisted that its toes were touching and the heels spread flat out. Ginger noticed that the clothes were all ripped, and the flesh too, yet bloodlessly, as though of a body long dead.

“Wonder ’oo it is. . . . Can’t be . . .” He didn’t finish his question, but crept up to the figure and peered over to see the face. The face he saw was surprisingly like Snowdrop’s, yet somehow quite different. Snowdrop’s face was always crinkling into new shapes. “Funny face ’e ’ad” (the men heard him muttering), “never stopped, like ’is eyes. Black eyes, always on the go, like a bird’s. Not like these eyes, stiff and solemn and starey. All the same . . . fellows do change a bit, and there ain’t another anything like Snowdrop. . . . Same badges, too. . . . Same mess on ’is serge where ’e spilt the candle grease.”

When he noticed the candle grease he stopped talking and, picking up the body, carried it a little way back and buried it in a deep shell-hole, putting up a rough cross of his own making, on which he hung the dead man's helmet.

While he was so working, a man came up and begged him to let him help. Blake never answered a word, but the man, watching for a few moments, saw the other pull out of his pocket a draggled black object, that might once have been a bonnet, and bury it with his dead chum.

“And that shows as how Ginger has given over being a comic for the duration, anyhow,” the watcher assured his mates.

When Blake had finished he went to his officer and reported, handing over his friend's identity disc, pay-book and private belongings.

The subaltern made a note of where the grave was, detaining Blake while he

thought of something to say. The fellow seemed so thoroughly changed.

“Look here,” he said at last. “You two, you know, you have always done a lot to buck up everybody. Kept ’em amused. You—you owe it to Piggott to—to do his share as well now—you know.”

“War isn’t a game, sir,” said Blake.

“I know,” said the other, “but we can try and make it one.”

“I’ve cut that out, sir,” said Blake.

The subaltern did not know what to say.

“Well, don’t go and get killed or anything,” he said at last.

“No, sir. Not if I can help it. I’m going to get my own back first.”

We asked the subaltern afterwards if he had noticed anything strange about Blake when he said this.

“Not a thing,” said the subaltern.

“He was perfectly natural, except that he didn’t smile, as he usually did. He was

too busy hating the Hun to smile. He just had two ideas in his head. His pal and the fellow he was going to kill. And then I suppose they got muddled up.

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For two hours Blake lay absolutely rigid, his sights covering a gap in the German trenches some eighty yards away where a shell had blown in the parapet, and his finger crooked upon the trigger. His mind was set on one thing only—to kill. He had shot a good few Germans in the past two years, but that was just part of the game. Now he was out to kill.

The subaltern found him lying there, and watched for a while through a periscope.

“Poor old Snowdrop,” he heard Blake mutter.

Suddenly a face appeared in the gap and for a second a German came into full

view—a little dark man. The rifle cracked, and the German sprang up, twisted, and fell sprawling, face downwards, to the ground.

“Hit him,” said the subaltern, but Private Blake was staring across No-Man’s-Land, and gradually the rifle slipped from his hands.

“Good shot, you hit him all right,” said the subaltern. He wondered at the sniper’s silence, and turned to see if anything was the matter.

Private Blake, his eyes still staring at the enemy lines, was groping back into the trench. He began to mutter.

“Why, my boy, what’s wrong?” asked the officer.

“I’ve killed him,” said Blake, very slowly. “Killed Snowdrop. Killed my mate. Whew, now I’ve done it.”

Then the subaltern looked at his eyes, and saw that the man was mad.

Fragments

Fragments

I

“AND Graves?” asked the C.O.

“Still at point 58, I think, sir. He sent a message last night. He’s holding on with five men. Tried to send him a Lewis gun this morning, but they got wiped out half-way there. Pretty hopeless.”

“And we’ve damn all to send him,” said the C.O.

A subaltern came down the dug-out. “We’ve salvaged two machine-guns, sir. One Lewis and a Vickers, and I’ve got half a dozen men to work ’em. I’ve put the Vickers in Sap B, and I thought of taking the other out to Graves.”

“How will you go?”

“Round by the quarry and up O.G.I. There’s bits of the trench left. You can’t get through from this side.”

“Right. Try it. But if it’s hopeless, don’t go further than the Gap. We want every man we can get. I’m afraid we’ll have to leave Graves if he’s not already scuppered. Anyhow, try it.”

The subaltern took his party round the fringe of the bombardment till he came to the Gap, and there he reconnoitred. O.G.I.—the old German 1st line—was by now completely obliterated. It was only a hundred yards or so to where Graves was supposed to be holding on, but a thick screen of bursting shells lay between him and his goal. It looked quite hopeless and he decided to post his gun where he was.

Suddenly the shelling stopped for a moment and the smoke cleared away. The subaltern looked across and could see nothing. The ground was pitted and

piled up like sand dunes, littered with bodies and the wreckage of trenches. He realized that by some chance the shelling had cast up a line of these dunes that would screen him from the enemy, but the first fifty yards were open. He wondered if it was worth the dash across. Then he looked at his goal and for an instant saw a figure move, a figure in khaki, crawling up a dune to look out, and then bob down again.

“Poor devils,” he said. “Come on, boys, make a dash for it.”

Their luck was in. They got to the shelter, just as the shelling swooped down again. They crawled on, and one man was hit in the groin and was left behind. The subaltern, looking back to see how his men were following, found that shelling had shifted a dune they had passed, and thrown up a huge barrier behind them.

“A minute later and we’d all have been

buried," he thought. "Graves must have been having a bloody time."

He came to the place where he'd seen the khaki figure. There were bodies lying everywhere, German and English, in a fearful litter and most of them ripped to pieces by bombs, and some with their skulls smashed in by rifle butts.

"God, but he's been fighting," thought the subaltern.

Then Graves came up from a dug-out, filthy, haggard and unwashed.

"Hullo, Johnny," he said. "I'm glad to see you. Got any baccy on you? I've run out."

II

I had no wish to overhear, but I was lying above the trench, watching for movements in the German rear, and I could not move. I heard him talking and thought it was someone else in the captured trench.

“ You see,” he said, “ I didn’t want to do it, but what could I do ? There were only four of us, and once we’d got the trench we had to hold it at all costs. My own side comes first, you know. There were six of them down in that dug-out, but there might have been any number, for all I could tell. I couldn’t even spare a man to guard them. And if I’d let them come up, and sent them back to our lines, well, there are such crowds of rifles lying about, they could have done us in. And you know you really can’t trust the Hun. At least, I can’t, can you ? It must have looked awfully rotten and unsporting, I’m afraid, but I just had to bomb them.

“ So, God. You’ll understand, won’t You ? ”

III

Privates Keppey, Veale and Swainton were sitting in the trench, oiling their machine-gun.

As I passed them, Veale was telling of his girl and the others were listening with heavy respect.

At each fresh instance of her charm, Private Keppey sucked his teeth audibly and said, "Yes, they're like that." Veale was a dark, sullen-looking boy, a smart soldier, but always on the defensive with everyone. In the sunshine that afternoon, however, his neck bare and shapely, his teeth as white as his hair was black, smiling, he struck me for the first time as being a charmingly handsome boy. "She's just all right," he said.

Suddenly there was an explosion. I thought it was a mine at first, but it continued and I realized a bombardment had started.

"Get the gun under cover," I shouted, "and rush out directly the Strafe stops." I raced down to the next gun.

The bombardment traversed along our

trench like a waterspout. At the next gun position I ran to earth, and the barrage thundered overhead. It passed and we swarmed up. The trench had gone. I went to see how Keppey's gun had fared. I found the gun tossed on to the side of a shell-hole. Strangely enough, only the tripod was injured. I hauled it into position and looked for the men. Where they had been was only battered earth.

Out of the earth I saw a hand clutching at the air. I had to get the gun into action. Soon the hand was still.

Next day it was already clay-brown.

IV

I was busy on a map, showing machine-gun positions, and he—my host in the dug-out—was sitting on a packing-case smoking and thinking.

“A man of mine went mad to-day,” he said. “Funny. He was as hard as nails.

No nonsense about him, and he went mad. What's the reason ? ”

“ Don't know,” I answered.

“ I thought you'd understand,” he said.

“ Why ? ”

“ Oh, you're the kind of chap that might.”

“ Might what ?—Go mad ? Or understand ? ”

Raikes laughed. “ Well,” he said, “ you're one of those imaginative cards, aren't you ? ”

“ Anyhow you're not,” I snapped. “ You're safe enough,” and I went on with my map. I think he imagined he had hurt my feelings, for he said that it took every kind to make a world and he supposed the same applied to the Army. He was a good fellow, with a laugh like a roar, that bellowed out long after all cause for amusement had passed. Between the joke and the laugh he looked at the

world with a heavy puzzled air, and then the roar came. His men worshipped him. He was so intensely human and yet the only man I met who seemed utterly without fear.

I often thought about madness in the next few days, for we had several cases of "nerves" in various forms that puzzled me. Generally, they were the men I least expected to be shattered.

I was on the point of mentioning it to Raikes one day as we sat watching a sap, but the Boy came along full of some excitement. I was a stranger in that battalion, but one could never be a stranger with the Boy. He bubbled music-halls and games during any "Strafe," and was a friend of all the world, from the Gaiety chorus to the Brigadier, to say nothing of all the dogs in the neighbourhood. He came up the trench that day with a fluffy mongrel puppy snapping

round his heels. The dog had come from goodness knows where. Enough that the Boy was within reach, and the dog found him.

“Hullo, young linseed, what’s your trouble?” said Raikes.

“Morning, papah,” answered the Boy. “I’ve just put it across Sergeant-Major. Betted him my new boots I’d get a bomb into that sap before he did. And I won my bet and put the wind up the Hun and——” And in a second the Boy was dead, blown to fragments by a trench-mortar shell.

I, too, was blown off my feet and when I looked up, the puppy was creeping back along the trench. It sniffed the fragments and began whining. I glanced at Raikes.

Raikes wore just that look—that heavy puzzled look, which foreshadowed a bellow. Then something seemed to snap in him. His whole face was suddenly convulsed

and—he roared. It was the devil of a laugh. Meanwhile the puppy was licking the Boy's hand. It was all that could be recognized of him. Raikes laughed again. I saw him get on to the fire-step and tried to stop him. He smashed down my effort and jumped over the top, sobbing now, and crying, "Bloody murderers." In a minute he was dead.

v

There will come a time, I suppose, when all this war will be merely a memory for us. When, of all that I see now, this warm, candle-lit dug-out, the clumsy mud-covered bodies, sleeping all around, the wreaths of smoke from those of us who sit, as I, and think and puff, and send, as though they are the expression of our deep thinking, great clouds circling around the narrow room, the dark stairway, the crest of parados silhouetted sharply against

the twinkling night sky, of all these only the sky and the stars will remain—and, most important of all, our pipes.

For the stars have always been too aloof to remind me particularly of the war. They are so utterly detached, and seem at times to regard our little campaign with mockery. “Alone with the stars” is a phrase I have never understood, I only feel at times, alone, because of them. But my pipes——

If they live and if I live, they shall have a rack apart, a resting-place not of glory, but of old friendship. They know me through and through. They know when I am afraid, not afraid, but terrified, when my nerves have got so shaken, that every new thing, even a slackening in the shelling, makes me dread what is coming, and I puff and puff enough to give away the whole position. They know how to bring me to that feeling that everything is worth

while; they can soothe with the feeling of fellowship, with the jollity of ideals. And in those moments when the world seems coming to an end for us, when our men, answering us one moment, are swept away the next in a storm of fragments, when one goes still about one's business, feeling that since one must die, one should die well, in those moments a pipe brings a feeling almost of contentment, that we like the smoke shall rise, and disappear, but rise for all that.

Vale

Vale

“**O**VER the top to-morrow, boys,”
said the C.O.

“Please, sir, there ain’t no top,” said Four Eyes, wearing spectacles and a second lieutenant’s star, although he was acting captain.

The C.O. turned to me. “Four Eyes is always so damned correct in his statements. You’ve hardly noticed it yet, perhaps. Anyhow, we’re for it to-morrow. Here are your details. Any news?”

Four Eyes returned to the paper he was reading and replied gravely: “Yes, sir. Our gallant boys again have punished the Hun. Another brilliant victory is recorded to our score at Contalmaison. This morning, just as the mist was rising above the shell-scarred field of battle, I

stood among what so lately were German trenches and watched our fine lads sweep up in an irresistible line across the pitted No-Man's-Land, and plunge merrily . . .”

“Shut up,” said a voice from the corner of the dug-out, “that bilge makes me tired.”

Four Eyes turned on him reproachfully : “It’s a most stirring dispatch. The editor says so.”

“I quite thought we were in that show, till I read the account,” said the voice in the corner. “It makes me tired.”

“Hello, Tony,” said the C.O. “What’s your trouble? Tummy? Well, what I really wanted to say is that to-morrow’s our last show and then we’re going out.”

“Thank God,” came in universal chorus.

“Hush,” said Four Eyes. “England is ashamed of you. What? Glad to leave this glorious victory? Tut, Tut. What will the old men think, who only

wish they were young enough to come out with us. More tuts. And how about the war correspondents? You would shock them. You would, indeed. You aren't a correspondent in disguise, are you?" he said, looking at me with serious eyes through large, round spectacles. "You don't thrill daily with the deathless glory of our doings, what? Or are you just a simple, lion-hearted subaltern, cheery and irrepressible and all that?"

"Don't mind Four Eyes, he's always like that," said the man called Tony. "One of the horrors of war. When you've scoffed your tea, come and have a look at the gun positions."

We clambered out of the dug-out into the afternoon sun, wormed our way up a battered trench and reached the front line.

"Four Eyes is right," said Tony Wills. "There's not much top to get over."

No doubt once it had been a trench, but

now was merely a chain of shell-holes, with odd bits of the original line here and there, that only showed how complete had been the devastation. Odd shells came blustering from time to time, and burst near the trench, but the Germans were too busy on our flanks to worry much about that frail section of the front, and so, curled up in holes and smelly dug-outs, the men slept carelessly.

We found a machine-gun sergeant and with him crawled round looking for positions. We knew exactly where we had to fire, the only difficulty lay in recognizing these places from the map, and in finding fire positions which would not interfere with the infantry's attack. To our left lay Pozières, on the crest of a hill, looking for all the world like a volcano, that every moment belched out great spurts of smoke and dust. On our right, as though a reaper had passed over it,

leaving nothing but the stubble of trees, was Mametz Wood. A cloud of smoke rose from its northern end and slowly covered all the hillside. These were our only landmarks, except for occasional bits of trenches, that showed here and there towards the skyline. Otherwise there was nothing to be seen, but the bare, mangled ground, and the warm sky, dotted everywhere with bursting shrapnel. We fixed our positions at last, posted the guns and began to crawl back. On our way, we found a good portion of the trench had been blown in. In the crater lay the remains of three or four men.

“Those are men I’ve known since they first joined up,” said Wills, “and now—*toute une marmelade.*”

He took all that was necessary, gave orders for them to be buried and we passed on. Then, in a little culvert, he sat down and pulled out his pipe.

“Four Eyes is right in his funny old way,” he said. “They make war such a vulgar thing at home. It’s bloody, but it’s not vulgar. Four Eyes is a gallant little fellow, and when all is said and done, he’s the type of fellow that’s doing the fighting now.

“You’d think he’d swallow the clap-trap that represents war opinion, but he hates it worse than any of us. He’s really fighting for an ideal, I do believe.”

Wills sucked for a little, then turned to me and said :

“Do you think you’re going to get through this war ? ”

“I do, thank God,” I said.

“I’m not,” he said. “I’ve known it for some time and now I’m sure. That’s why I’m talking like this. It’s rather a relief in a way to be able to talk. No one can say I’m trying to back out. I’m quite happy about it, because I know that it’s all

right. This war, I mean. I know why I came out to fight and it still holds good. But then we don't count.

“That's the solemn truth. We don't count. Ask anyone at home what we're fighting for, and he'll look frightened and talk about the destruction of various things: Germany, Prussian militarism, anything, but always destruction, *Toute une marmelade*, like my poor men there. They're all frightened of something, terrified, especially of thinking. But as we're all fighting for peace, why don't people discuss it? Why the devil don't we say in so many terms what we're fighting for and stick to it?

“These damned politicians running the show. They just expect us to carry on till someone crashes, or there's a dead-lock, and then they'll begin to think about peace. Now it's too difficult for them. They can't see our ideals because of their

details. And *you've* got to go on fighting. I'm out of it. A looker-on. I'd laugh, if it weren't for my men. Four Eyes and the rest are my pals, and I'm fond of them. However, they can look after themselves. But my men. . . . They've got to go on trusting us, our class at home, until they die. More marmelade.

“ They've got to go on fighting, while men at home—fat, stupid, old men—urge them on. You'd think they needed urging. Ye gods! And even if they did the insolence of one man urging another to go and fight for him. I wonder if people who pride themselves on having induced fellows to join sometimes feel funny when they read the casualty lists? People aren't bad, they're just damnably vulgar. They don't think.

“ At home, of course, they'd call me a Peace Crank. Well, we're an army of Peace Cranks—only we want a lasting

peace—one based on ideals, 'cos they are the only things that are lasting.”

It was this remark that made me think. The certainty he had of his own death, and the freedom of thought this certainly gave him, rather shocked me at first. But then it was his very detachment that made his point of view so unassailable. In his own mind he was dead already, and he wanted to know in whose hands, as it were, he was leaving his men.

However, I said in a foolish way : “ But this is all rather socialistic, isn't it ? ”

Wills looked at me quickly. “ Lord, I didn't know you were that kind of fool, or I'd have kept mum.”

“ What kind of fool ? ” I asked.

“ The fellow who screams ‘ socialist ’ directly he's asked to think. Good Lord, don't you see I'm begging you, you as one of the hide-bound old officer class, to get

some sort of responsibility into your fat head? You look after your men, don't you? Give 'em cigarettes, and see their feet are clean, and get 'em the best billets, and look after 'em in action, and play sort of father, mother and maiden aunt to 'em. And it pays, doesn't it? You're fond of them and they of you. You do the best you can for them and they return the compliment. That's not Socialism, is it? Oh no, 'cos it's something that's regulation. It's done by all the best regiments. But, my God, man, don't you see that it's an ideal? Sound practical common sense. Why can't it be done in business?—and all through our social system? I believe in the officer class. If only I thought you'd stick together afterwards as you do now, I'd die happy. And you could, so jolly easily, if only you thought. But you'll lose confidence when you get home, and start class wars again.

“ Oh, damn it all, man, do make an effort.”

.
I was moved to another part of the line that night and two months later went home on my way to “ somewhere else.”

In London I went to a shop in the Strand to get photographed for my passport, and there, staring solemnly through his spectacles at the camera, was Four Eyes. He recognized me and we shook hands with ceremony.

“ By the by,” he told me, “ we took that trench all right. Tony Wills—do you remember him?—did all the dirty work. A nasty-minded machine-gun opened out just as we were getting up, and Wills settled it with a bomb, first shot. We were taken out of the Somme that night and sent up North.”

“ And Wills ? ” I asked.

“ Oh, didn't you hear ? He was killed

just before we came out. Hit by a ' rico ' half-way down a Hun dug-out. I was close behind him and he just dropped and said ' poor lads ' and died.

“ He was the bravest fellow I ever knew.”

“ And something more than that,” I answered.

Four Eyes stared up at me, then shook my hand with far less ceremony.

“ It's up to us now,” he said.



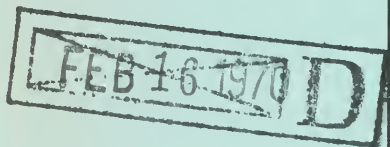
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